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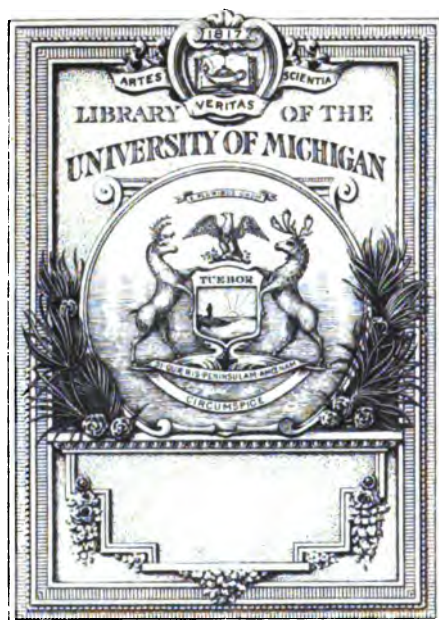
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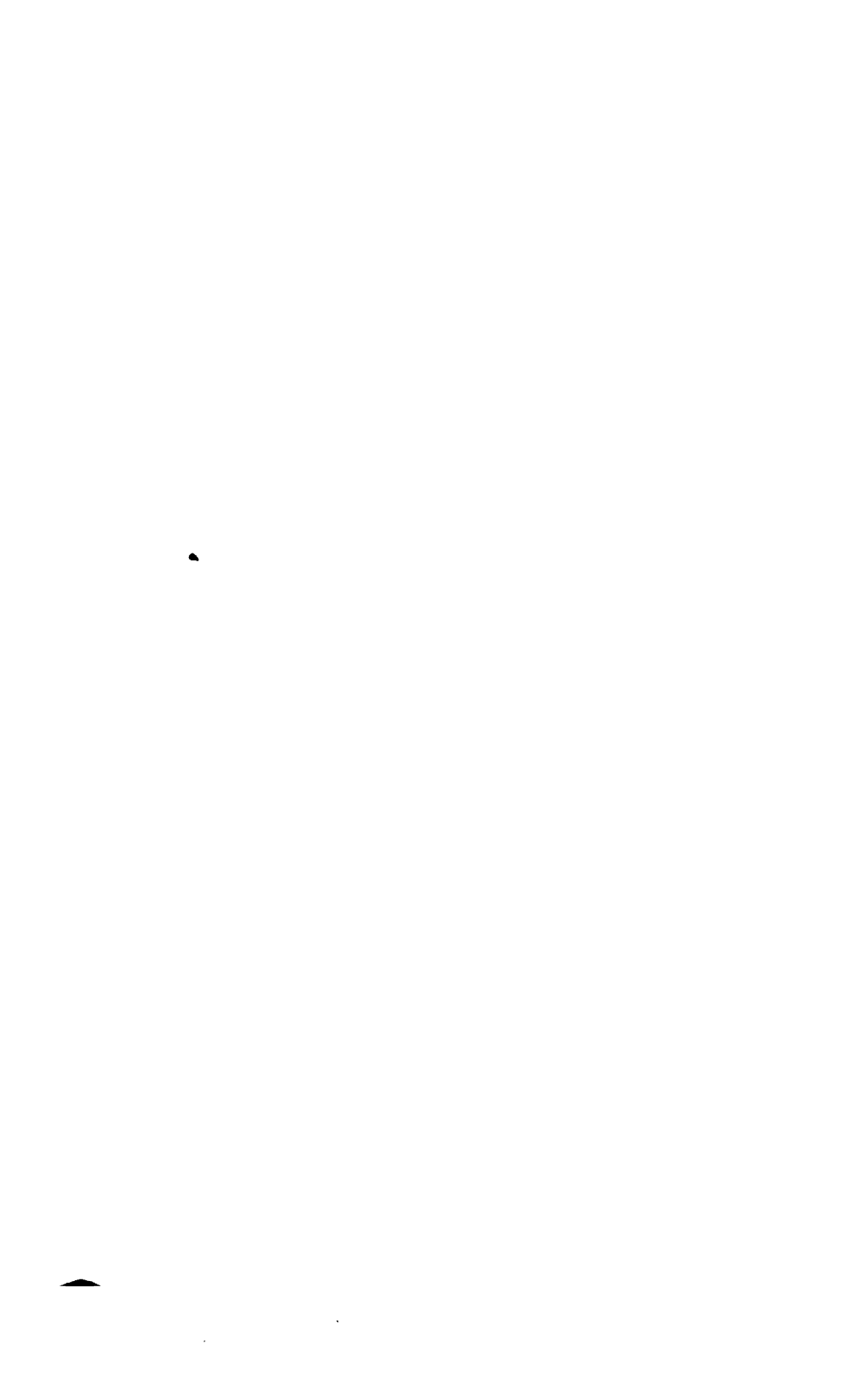
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A

VIEW OF NATURE.

VOL. VI.



A
VIEW OF NATURE,
IN LETTERS
TO A TRAVELLER AMONG THE ALPS.
WITH
REFLECTIONS
ON
ATHEISTICAL PHILOSOPHY,

NOW EXEMPLIFIED IN

F R A N C E.

BY RICHARD JOSEPH ^lSULIVAN, Esq.
F. R. S. AND F. A. S. 1

*Mala enim, et impia consuetudo est contra Deos disputandi, sive ex
animo id fit, sive simulate.*

CICERO.

IN SIX VOLUMES.

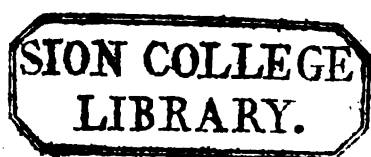
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LETTERS
TO A
TRAVELLER
AMONG THE ALPS.

LETTER XC.

MEN who have rashly ventured to lay a licentious hand upon belief the most sacred, and opinions the most comfortable and revered, have uniformly perched themselves upon a pinnacle, whence they have thundered to the world their superior knowledge, their unequalled talents, and the great obligations due to them for their toilsome labours, and their disinterested exertions. Like their predecessor Sysiphus, however, though they have rolled the rock nearly to the summit, yet there, finding it recoil, they have, with the rapidity of lightening, plunged to

the common level whence they had ascended, and again commenced their work, always in the same track, but always with the same failure.

Upon the observance of the moral and religious duties depends the wholesome existence of human society, which would crumble into nothing, if mankind were not generally impressed with a reverence for these important rules of conduct. This reverence is still further enhanced by the opinion which is first impressed by nature, and afterwards confirmed by philosophy, that these rules are the commands and laws of the Deity, who will finally reward the obedient, and punish the transgressors. And thus, upon whatever we suppose our moral faculties to be founded, whether upon a certain modification of reason, upon an original instinct (which is a baseless idea, for instinctive virtue or vice would necessarily discard all prospects of an immortality) called a moral sense, or upon whatever other principle of our nature, it cannot be doubted, they were given us for the direction of our conduct in this life.*

Were we to judge of the importance of events by the greatness of their effects, and their influence

* Adam Smith.

ence on the well-being of mankind, we should naturally be led to conclude, that no history whatever can be so interesting, as that of the rise and progress of Christianity. The change it has occasioned in the world, is unspeakably more wonderful in its nature than any which was ever brought about by the establishment of empires, from the beginning of the world to the present day; the Roman empire itself, which was of the greatest extent, and the longest duration, not excepted. While they all, in their turns, have dwindled to decay and ruin, the kingdom of the Messiah is still extending itself. In its progress, it has been marked by two glorious and decisive victories: it has conquered the learned and luxurious citizens of the Roman world; and has subdued the warlike barbarians of Scythia and Germany, who subverted the empire, and afterwards embraced the religion of Rome.* Nor are we to doubt that it will at length embrace the bulk of mankind, and continue to the end of time. It already spreads its wings over the face of America. Even New-Zealand may, in the course of ages, learn justice from its law, and mercy from its gospel.

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• Gibbon.

In regard to its evidence, it is a peculiarly favourable circumstance, that Christianity took its deepest root in the most civilized and learned, and consequently the most inquisitive part of the world. The Jews inculcated its excellent moral precepts. The heathens, even while they persecuted it, acknowledged the benefits of its institutes. * Yet, whatever learning or genius could do, was at first done against Christianity, because its origin was wholly among the illiterate. But neither all the argument, nor all the force of the mighty Roman authority, could stop the current of its pure and benevolent principles. † Look at the first preachers of the gospel, who taught men to subdue all irregular desires of pleasure, of wealth, and power, and to suppress every tendency of the heart to pride, vanity, and vain glory.

The Apostles, by what they taught, had no hope to make themselves popular, either with the higher, or with the lower orders of mankind, for they flattered no human vice, but absolutely prohibited every dereliction from right reason. A few unlettered fishermen from Judea were thus to enlighten and civilize the world ! Their mission, indeed, was not authenticated by the formality

* Julian.

† Priestley.

formality of certificates, nor did they go about to collect evidences and testimonies. They acted with greater simplicity, and with the open confidence of truth. They delivered their narrations in a plain and artless form; nor did they take pains to prepossess or influence mankind. Not one of their enemies was ever able to convict them of falsehood. They never varied in their accounts; they persisted in them, with an unshaken constancy, and sealed them with their blood; and it gives no small weight to their testimony, that they bore witness to facts which were designed to confirm a scheme of religion, contrary to their own most rooted prejudices.

Can we suppose, that twelve men should combine to assert a falsehood, at the hazard of their lives, without any view to private interest, and with the certain prospect of losing by it every thing that is, or ought to be, dear to mankind in this world? No Pagan ever laid down his life for the honour of Isis or Osiris, for Jupiter, for Neptune, or Apollo. Moreover, even those who are so sceptical, as to be contented scarcely with any thing short of demonstration, must acknowledge, that there is in the birth and death of Christ, in the unparalleled sublimity of his doctrine; in the coincidence, and unconcerted testimony of

his disciples ; in the sanction given to their assertions, by their subsequent persecutions and death ; and in the extraordinary-fulfilment of the prophecies of the Old Testament ; something more than a probability, that the dispensation of Christianity was not a fabric of craft and imposture.

It is not, I should presume, readily to be believed, that the Apostles of Christ could have been so pertinaciously deranged, as to have submitted to the most excruciating torments, and even to the most agonizing deaths, merely for the support of what they knew to be *untrue*. Those of the church, indeed, afterwards, who sunk under martyrdom, might, had it been false, have been involved in the obstinacy of prepossession : they might have blindly confided in an imposture, handed down to them by their fathers. But, for the Apostles themselves, who were witnesses and principals concerned in all that had passed, that they should have devoted themselves to death, was a species of phrenzy, more contrary to nature than any that is to be traced in the annals of the world. Who ever saw hypocrisy keep up the cheat, when destruction, both here and hereafter, was to be inevitably the consequence?

The

The apprehensions of the man could not have failed to operate, although the anger of the Divinity should have been disregarded. Surely then the Apostles must have imagined, that they had heard and seen what they had never heard and seen; or that they had enquired into the truth of recent facts, when they had made no enquiry at all; and must have sacrificed their ease, their liberty, their property, and their lives, for a mere fancy, an illusion of the brain: What an extraordinary, what a miraculous infatuation of mind must they, in this manner, have been under, to no purpose, but to subject them to the most grievous sufferings, and to delude, in all future ages, the residue of their fellow-creatures! This is to me a strange and incredible supposition. It has been insinuated, however, that they were encouraged to bear the harshness of their sentences with patience, and even with joy, because they were animated by the very singular incentive of earthly glory crowning their afflictions, that their testimony should be celebrated by panegyrical orations, and annual festivals, and that the greatest veneration would, at all times, follow the unparalleled disinterestedness of their conduct.

But is it really true, that there are any tra-
 to be found of such feeble and comfortless ex-
 pectations? There exists in us all an inherent
 love of life, which is so deeply engraven by the
 hand of nature, that it seems to form an essen-
 tial part of the soul. Self-preservation is the
 fundamental law of our being; it is the pas-
 sion, which precedes every other in the order of
 utility, and is implanted by the Creator, as the
 root from which every social and religious obli-
 gation necessarily springs; and in no other light,
 that I can find, did the Apostles ever conceive it.
 Yet, they, notwithstanding, heedless of conse-
 quences, and regardless of every consideration
 but truth, openly encountered hazards which
 they felt were to terminate in their destruction.

The instances recorded, however, of aposto-
 lic zeal, are not, I will confess, irrefragably di-
 rect proofs of the truth of Christianity; for
 every religion, nay every absurd sect of religion,
 has had its zealots, who have not scrupled to
 maintain their principles at the expence of their
 lives; and we ought no more, I acknowledge,
 to infer the truth of Christianity from the mere
 zeal of its propagators, than the truth of Mahom-
 medanism, from that of the Turks.* Even
 though

* Bishop Watson.

though a man suffer himself to be covered with infamy, pillaged of his property, and dragged at last to the block or the stake, rather than give up his opinion, it does not necessarily follow, that his opinion is true ; it is only evident, that he believes it to be true.

The ancient inhabitants of Europe, as we have seen, sought death with eagerness in the field of battle ; or welcomed its approach in the decline of age, with the transports of heroic joy. The ancient Brachmans, to shun the wearisome decay of lingering sickness, anticipated the hour of death, and devoted themselves to the flames. The American, remains unmoved amid the dreadful preparations for a lingering execution, and defies, in the agonies of torture, the ingenious cruelty of his foes. The delicate Hindoo, with steady pace, and unaltered look, ascends the funeral pile, and becomes a willing sacrifice to the manes of her husband.

In these cases, however, we behold nothing but the effect of national custom, and inveterate habit. Such self-devoted victims have been regularly trained, from their birth, to the contemplation of spectacles of torture and of death ; and their perpetual occurrence, operating upon
pre-

predisposed manners and temper, have prepared the way for the ready sacrifice of life. On contemplating the situation and circumstances of an Apostle of Christ, however, his case will appear to be widely different. He was unfettered by prejudice, untainted by example, forbid even by religion, and dissuaded by common sense. He was alive to all the endearments of social life, and attached to the world by all those tender ties of affection, which hold the heart in the most permanent captivity. Hence naturally must have arisen a contest, between the love of God, and the love of life; between the suggestions of conscience, and the calls of affection; between the claims of rigid duty, and the exhortations of violated nature.

What could have been the motive, then, which could have induced the Apostles to deceive mankind? What good, real or imaginary, could they have had in view, if they had been conscious what they affirmed was falsehood? Certain it is, when Christ left them, they could no longer expect to advance their temporal interest by adhering to his cause. On the contrary, they were told by him, from the first, and after his death, they knew and believed, that persecution and martyrdom would be their lot in
this

this world ; and as their Jewish education would also have taught them that God is just and holy, they, knowing themselves to be deceivers, could entertain no hope with respect to the next. This must equally have been the state of their mind, whether, with the Pharisees, they believed in a future state ; or with the Sadducees, they denied it.*

Present gain, indeed, has the faculty of tempting the covetous ; present power, the ambitious ; or present pleasure, the sensual ; and a delusive hope of future gratification or reward, may have the same operation with the enthusiast. But, where none of these temptations exist (and in the instance of the Apostles, it is certain, none of them did or could exist) what was there in nature, or in the human imagination, which could induce them to encounter a life of pain, poverty, persecution, and scorn, in support of an untruth ? All the impostors who have appeared upon earth, have arrived at the acquisition of temporal advantages, of pleasure, wealth, or power ; and in truth it is impossible to conceive what other motives can induce a rational being to become an impostor.

But.

* Beattie's Evid. Christ.

But let us for a moment take for granted, what is to me plainly absurd, and suppose it possible, that the Apostles might, during the life of Christ, have been imposed upon ; that he might have disappointed them, in their expectations of his being a great temporal prince, who was to make the Jews the most powerful people in the world ; that the miracles they saw him perform, were not real, but fictitious ; that the divine sanctity of his manners was assumed, not genuine ; and that the excellency of his doctrine, the authority that accompanied all his words, and the veneration which his presence inspired, were the effect of mere human eloquence and address : yet, surely his death, had it put an end to his being, would have at last opened their eyes, and have satisfied them, that he was not what he had declared himself to be. And after such conviction, they unquestionably would not, they could not, in opposition to every temporal, and every immortal felicity, have persisted in, and sealed the falsehood with their blood.

The amazing, and if I may so style it, supernatural courage, which was shewn by the Apostles in those slow and painful torments that were inflicted upon them, is to me, a
proof

proof convincing and incontrovertible. I cannot believe that man guilty of falsehood, who, amid the insults and mockeries of a crowded amphitheatre, and with an uncomplaining carriage and aspect, can resignedly suffer himself to be torn limb from limb ; or who, stretched upon a grate of iron, over coals of fire, can breathe out his soul among the exquisite sufferings of such a tedious execution, rather than renounce his religion, or blaspheme his Saviour. Such trials seem to me above the strength of human nature, and able to overbear duty, reason, faith, nay, almost conviction itself. Humanity, unaided by the sacred energy of truth, must have shaken off the present pressure, and have delivered itself out of such dreadful distress, by any means that could have been suggested. To expire leisurely among the most exquisite tortures, when it was in their power to be released from them, even by a mental reservation, or an hypocritical declaration, which was not without a possibility of being followed by repentance and forgiveness, has something in it so far beyond the natural strength of mortals, that I cannot but think their conduct grounded on a certainty, which ought to afford conviction to every reasonable being.

Yet,

Yet, is it to be credited, that in the attempts to invalidate the evidence of the gospel, these most affecting calamities of the first Christians are recounted with indifference, and sometimes even represented, as rather objects of contempt than of compassion and respect? Do writers, indeed, forget, or wish to forget, that those who endure misfortunes with magnanimity, are among the most edifying, as well as the most interesting subjects of history? Ignorance of the best feelings of the human heart can alone apologize for misrepresentation; and an uncommiserating perversion of the understanding, for the oblivion of sentiment. I do not, however, by this mean to insinuate, that there are not dissenters from Christianity, who, though they admire the doctrine, may yet have the misfortune to be dissatisfied with the evidence of the gospel. But charity itself forbids one to suppose, that this can be the case with those who labour to subvert, by uncandid distortion and insidiousness, the faith of others. Can that man, let me ask you, wish the gospel, or its precepts, to be true, who employs his life in labouring to prove it false?

The Apostle of the Gentiles, I believe it is generally allowed, was not a weak man. Those

were not weak men, who taught a system of opinions, which even the sovereigns of the world, and some of the least cruel, the most learned, and the most politic, thought it their interest to bear down and destroy. Those were not weak men, who, in defiance of persecution, and in opposition to all the power, policy, and learning of the Roman empire, brought in, though unarmed and defenceless, a new religion, which continues to this day, is gradually extending itself over the earth, and by the gentle voice of reason, puts to silence, or confutes at least, its most inveterate adversaries. Were those weak men, who taught that which has given wisdom and happiness to millions of mankind, and has, without violence, introduced into the manners and policy of a great part of the world, changes the most important and beneficial, and likely to be as durable as the world itself? Could those, in fine, be weak men, whom the most inquisitive and most enlightened minds, that have been on earth since their time, have held in the highest veneration? Either, then, it must be admitted, that the publishers of Christianity were not weak men, or that the innumerable great and illustrious characters of every country in Europe, who have followed, and most faithfully adhered

adhered to this doctrine, have been of inferior understandings, compared with the luminous body of past and present latitudinarians, and anti-christian philosophers.

Not only the Jews, but all other nations, for a considerable time before the coming of Christ, expected a Messiah; and even about the time when he was born, it was currently believed, that a great person of an extraordinary and unknown character would come into the world. Something of this was even supposed to be found in the Sybilline books. Suetonius says, "*Percrebuerat oriente toto vetus & constans opinio, esse in fatis ut Judæâ profecti rerum potirentur.*" And in addition to this eastern and constant opinion, that the fates had decreed, that some one coming out of Judea should govern the world, Tacitus says, "a great many were persuaded, it was recorded in the ancient books of the priests, that at that particular time the east should prevail, and some one coming out of Judea should have the sovereignty of the earth."

Of this great person * it was foretold, that he should be, in a peculiar sense, the son of a woman; that he should be a sufferer, but that he should

should bring destruction on the evil spirit. Two thousand years after, it was also foretold to Abraham, that this person should be of the posterity of Isaac, and a blessing to all nations; and it was afterwards predicted, that he should be of the tribe of Judah, and family of David, and be born of a virgin, in the town of Bethlehem: it was likewise foretold by the patriarch Israel, that till he should come, the Jewish government should not be subverted; and by the prophet Daniel, that at such a time, he should certainly die. It was also foretold, that the Messiah, this triumphant Saviour, should suffer the violent death of a malefactor, not, indeed, for any sin of his own, but for the sins of mankind; and that soon after his death, the city and temple of Jerusalem should be destroyed. It was even finally foretold, that notwithstanding this ignominious death, his dominion should be over all nations, and without end; that he should speak peace to the heathen, and introduce a new dispensation of things, tending to, and terminating in salvation, and happiness eternal.*

It was foretold, moreover, that he should preach good tidings to the poor, and perform many miracles for the alleviation of human calamity;

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lamity;

* Gerard's Sermons.

larmity; particularly, that he should give sight to the blind, speech to the dumb, hearing to the deaf, and the perfect use of their limbs to the lame. It was also distinctly predicted, that he should be sold for thirty pieces of silver, and that with this money a potter's field should be bought; that he should be scourged, buffeted, and spit upon; that he should be mock and silent before his accusers; that his hands and feet should be pierced, but that his bones should not be broken; that gall and vinegar should be offered him to drink; that lots should be cast for his garments; that he should be buried in a rich man's sepulchre; and that he should rise again without seeing corruption. Now, how far these predictions have been verified in Jesus, no person needs be informed, who has read the New Testament; and in him alone they have been verified, and in no other man that ever appeared upon earth. *

Those other predictions, indeed, which have been supposed to allude to the subsequent errors of his church, or to the Mahommedan imposition, it is not altogether so material for us to touch upon; because the world has not yet seen entirely their completion. But that of the destruction

* Beattie.

struction of Jerusalem, is not, on any account, to be over-looked ; as it was so soon, and in so signal a manner verified, although this city had flourished under the peculiar direction of heaven, upwards of two thousand years ; and as it related to an event, which, when our Saviour foretold it, the Jews being then at peace with the Romans, and apparently reconciled to their yoke, no human wisdom could possibly have foreseen. So great, in truth, is the resemblance between the prophecy and the calamity, as recorded by Josephus, who had the best opportunities of information, being himself an officer in the Jewish army, and present at the siege, that one would not be surprised, were the freethinker to suspect the event to have been prior to the prediction. But it is certainly known, and is extremely remarkable, that Matthew, Mark, and Luke, who have recorded this prophecy, were dead before the destruction of Jerusalem ; and that John, who survived it, has not recorded the prophecy.

Daniel, centuries before, had predicted, that after three score and two weeks, the Messiah should be cut off, and the people of the prince that should come, should destroy the city, and the sanctuary ; and the end thereof should be with a flood, and unto the end of the war, desolations.

lations. "Seest thou these great buildings?" says our Saviour, speaking of the temple. "There shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. The days shall come upon thee, O Jerusalem, when thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and shall keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and shall not leave thee one stone upon another. And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences, and fearful sights; and great signs shall there be from heaven. There shall be great tribulation, such as never happened from the beginning of the world, to this time. They shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles. This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled."

"Titus," says the historian,* "commanded his soldiers to dig up the foundations of both the city and the temple. His army compassed the city round about with a wall of thirty-nine furlongs, having on it thirteen towers; hemming them in on every side, and so making it impossible for the Jews within to escape. He also
commanded

* Josephus.

commanded his soldiers to dig up the city, which they did so completely, by levelling the whole compass of it, except three towers, that they who came to see it afterwards, were persuaded it could never be re-built."

In the times of Claudius and Nero, and a few years before the destruction of Jerusalem, it is recorded in history, and this by Gentile as well as Jew, that there happened in Judea a prodigious tempest, and vehement winds, with rain, and dreadful lightening and thunder, and roarings of the trembling earth. "The great gate of the temple was seen to open of its own accord: a sword appeared hanging over the city; a comet was seen pointing down upon it, for a whole year together. Before the sun went down, there appeared armies in battle array, and chariots compassing the country and investing the cities: a thing so strange, that it would pass for fable, were there not men living to attest it." Thus far Josephus. Mark, however, the corroboration of Tacitus. "Armies," says he, "seemed to encounter, and weapons to glitter in the sky; the temple seemed to blaze with fire issuing from the clouds; and a voice more than human, was heard, declaring that the deities were quitting

the place, which was attended with the sound of a great motion, as of persons going away."

I am ready, where it can be done, to construe liberally, and to understand figure and metaphor as such, if the language be not such as fairly to require a different interpretation. But surely, no nation ever suffered as the Jews did. All the miseries that mankind have in general experienced from the beginning of the world, have scarcely been to compare with those which the Jewish nation at that time suffered. The number of captives was ninety-seven thousand. Titus sent many of them into Egypt, and many he dispersed into the Roman provinces. * Suetonius says, that during the siege, there perished by famine, disease, and the sword, six hundred thousand. Josephus, and Jornandes after him, make them eleven hundred thousand. And not long subsequent to the siege, a general persecution of the Jews, we know, took place, throughout the whole of the Roman empire; and all these things, within the space of forty years after the death of our Saviour; so that the generation which was on earth, when he uttered this memorable prophecy, had not passed

* Josephus.

passed away, when it was, in all its parts, accomplished.

This extraordinary revolution has had consequences no less extraordinary. Ever since the period when Jerusalem was destroyed, the Jews have been dispersed through all nations, without obtaining a regular establishment in any; have been persecuted^d wherever they have gone; have been without a king, without a prince, and without a sacrifice; and yet have not lost their religion, nor been incorporated with the Gentiles, among whom they have sojourned, but still remain a distinct people. Has such been the fate of any other nation? Could this, then, have been foreseen, or foretold, by any but supernatural means? Now, of the Jews, this was foretold by Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, and Moses. Indeed, the whole history of this people, before their dispersion by Titus, and since, bears irrefragable testimony to the truth of the essential parts of the Scriptures.

This is more especially the case in regard to what immediately concerns our Saviour himself; how strongly, how pathetically! how much more like a history than a prophecy, doth Isaiah

pour forth his predictions ! * “ The Son of God shall be put to death by the very people who expect him, but who shall know him not. He shall expiate the sins of men by his sufferings. He shall be despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. He shall be wounded for their transgressions, and bruised for their iniquities ; but with his stripes they shall be healed : he shall bear the sins of the many, and be made intercessor for the transgressors. The Lord it shall please to bruise him, and to put him to grief ; but his seed he shall see ; and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands. So shall he sprinkle many nations ; the kings shall shut their mouths at him : for that which had not been told them, they shall see ; and that which they had not heard, they shall consider.”

That the history of the life of Christ, contained in the New Testament, is a true relation of matters of fact (not to insist on the testimony of his disciples and followers) will, to a rational inquirer, appear undeniable ; for this reason, that many particulars of that history are confirmed by the concurrent testimonies of profane, and unquestionably unprejudiced authors. I have already

ready mentioned some passages from Suetonius and Tacitus. That there lived in Judea, at the time referred to in the Gospels, such a person as Jesus of Nazareth, is acknowledged by all writers, both Jewish and Pagan, who have written since that time. That Augustus Cæsar had ordered the whole empire to be cessed or taxed, which brought our Saviour's reputed parents to Bethlehem, is mentioned by several Roman historians, as Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dion. That a great light, or a new star, appeared in the east, which directed the wise men to our Saviour, is recorded by Chalcidius. That Herod, the king of Palestine, made a great slaughter of innocent children, (being so jealous of his successor, that he put to death even his own sons) is related by Macrobius, who likewise gives us the reflexion cast upon him on that occasion, by the emperor Augustus. "*Cum audiisset (Augustus) inter pueros quos in Syria Herodes rex Judæorum intra bimatum jussit interfici, filium quoque ejus occisum, ait melius est Herodis porcum esse quam filium.*"* That our Saviour had been in Egypt, Celsus is so far from denying, that he tells us, Christ learned the arts of magic in that country. That Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea; that our Saviour was brought

* Lib. ii.

brought in judgment before him, and by him condemned, and crucified, is recorded by Tacitus: "Tiberio imperante, per præcuratorem Pontium Pilatum supplicio affectus erat.* But shortly after his death, upon Pilate's writing to Tiberius an account of his passion, resurrection, and miracles, that the emperor made a report of the whole to the senate, desiring that Christ might be considered as a God by the Romans. That many miraculous cures, and works out of the ordinary course of nature, were wrought by him, is confessed by Julian the apostate, Porphyry, and Hierocles; all of them, not only Pagans, but professed enemies, and persecutors of Christianity. That our Saviour foretold several things, which came to pass according to his predictions, is attested by Phlegon. That at the time when our Saviour died, there was a miraculous darkness, and a great earthquake, is recorded also by the same Phlegon, a Trallian, who was likewise a Pagan, and freedman of Adrian the emperor. †

All this, it is said, however, may be true, according to the received system of Christianity; but it is not to be doubted but that Jesus, from his infancy, might have been so trained by his family,

* Lib. xv.

† Clarke. Addison's Evid. of Chris.

mily, together with his relation John, as that both one and the other should afterwards have had the ability of forming themselves systematically, according to the prophecies and the various texts of Scripture? This is, indeed, doubting boldly; and certainly involves a question which may be supposed not very easily answered. But I think I perceive in it more sound than substance: for were I to say nothing more, than that, had Christ been without supernatural aid, it could never have been so accurately brought about, that the Romans should, most scrupulously, fulfil the ancient prophecies of the Israelites relative to him; or that the effects of his sufferings, so early predicted, should now, nearly two thousand years after his death, be daily more palpable and convincing; I think I should say enough. But Christ was neither an impostor, nor an enthusiast; for surely such sublime and rational insanity never existed. His life was innocent and spotless, spent entirely in serving the ends of holiness and charity; in doing good to men; in exhorting them to repentance; and inviting them to serve and to glorify God. When his bitterest enemies accused him, in order to take away his life, they could not charge him with one appearance of vice or immorality. And so far was he from being guilty of what they

they *did* accuse him, namely, of vain glory, and attempting to move sedition, that once, when the admiring people would, by force, have taken and made him king, he chose to work a miracle, to avoid the only thing which could have been imagined to have been the design of an impostor. In like manner, whoever considers seriously, the answers he gave to all questions, whether moral or captious, his occasional discourses to his disciples, and more especially the wisdom and excellency of his sermon upon the mount, which is, as it were, the system and summary of his doctrine, manifestly surpassing all the moral instructions of the most celebrated philosophers that ever lived, cannot charge him with duplicity or artifice.

With enthusiasm and superstition, indeed, great numbers of Jews, at first, adhered to Christ as their Messiah, or *national deliverer*; and by force would have placed the crown upon his head, and have set him up against the Romans. But when they found that he had no such ambitious designs, that he renounced any such pretensions, and declared he came not with any such particular view to the Jewish nation, "his kingdom not being of this world," they all deserted him; and cried out, "crucify him, crucify him."

him." For the intemperate zeal of the multitude he thus suffered. The high priest Caiaphas dreaded an insurrection, and consequently destruction, on his whole nation, from the Romans; and, therefore, though he could find no evidence against him of his having made pretensions to the government of the Jews, yet he thought it better that one innocent man should die, than that the whole people of Israel should run the risque of displeasing the tyrants of the world.

We are told, I know, that the use and intention of miracles, as quoted by the evangelists, were to prove that Jesus was the promised Messiah, or that prince of the house of David, lineally descended from him, who was to restore the kingdom and deliver the nation: the design of Matthew and Luke in particular, in their genealogies, being to prove the title of Jesus to the crown, as the right heir from David. And what is still more surprising, we are informed that these very evangelists who endeavour to prove his hereditary right to the kingdom, assure us at the same time, that he had no natural human descent, but that Mary conceived him by the Holy Ghost, or immediate power of God; while she was a pure virgin; consequently, that we are to consider him no more the son of

David than of Saul ; and no more of the seed of Abraham than of Melchizedek : and moreover, that as two of the evangelists mention nothing of this, so there is in reality no original proof or evidence, but Mary's own word, while she lay under a strong suspicion ; and Joseph had an inclination to put her away privately without making her a public example, and which he certainly would have done, had not an angel appeared and spoke to him in a dream ; or in other words, had he not dreamed an angel had appeared, and had so spoken, and so dissuaded him.

The prophet Isaiah, however, says, " A virgin shall conceive a son." Christ himself also (and the apostles afterwards) frequently appeal to the ancient prophets of the Jewish nation, for the truth of his mission and doctrines from God, as the person whom they had foretold. I will not, indeed, deny that Saint Paul seems to have understood Moses and the prophets, in all that relates to Christianity, in a figurative or allegorical and mystical sense ; and to have in great measure rejected the literal interpretation as false, absurd, and contrary to the true reason and spirit of the gospel. Jesus, likewise, never appeals to the prophets to prove that he was the Messiah who

was to restore the kingdom to the house of David; so far from it, he renounced this worldly character, and died upon the renunciation. And had he not done so, he would not have suffered as he did; nor could the Jewish priests and rulers, nor even the Romans themselves, have put him to death, agreeably to law. Pilate was sensible of this, and would have saved Jesus, had it been readily in his power. But, the enraged mob were vexed and disappointed, and they would not bear of mercy.

When we thus consider the subject, therefore, it is perhaps to be presumed, that Jesus was not, agreeably to the Israelitish interpretation, the Jewish Messiah, who, according to the prophecies concerning him, was to be a great temporal prince, and to restore the kingdom of Israel to the house of David. As the restorer of moral truth and righteousness, however, he was amply to fulfil the predictions which had announced him as the Saviour of the world. But, supposing Christ to have been an impostor, he must at least have the character allowed him of a most pure, a most holy, a most disinterested, and assuredly a most unexampled impostor. In what manner, supposing him such, could he have reasoned with himself? The Jews, he must have said,

said, are in expectation of the Messiah. The moment, established by their prophecies, is arrived. Wearied with the yoke of the Romans, they are ripe for a revolt. Will it be difficult to convince them I am the sovereign born to the Israelites? No. My birth, my education, the fulfilment of the predictions of the prophets, even before my birth, my talents, and my unequalled knowledge of morality, virtue, and truth, all are undoubted pledges of my success. But, then the prophecies also say, the Messiah shall be put to death; that he shall be rejected by his people; and that before his martyrdom he shall be put to the most exquisite tortures. Is it to be believed, then, let me ask, that any common man, much less one with the sublimest understanding, and the most tender nature, should have undertaken the fulfilment of a prophecy so personally disastrous?

Christ shed his blood, and gave up his life in the cause of virtue and of true religion; that he might complete his obedience, in the highest instance of submission and resignation to the will of God; and that he might obtain that honour and reward, which had been proposed and set before him, and in the hope and prospect of which he acted. His death was a vicarious propitiation.

putation. He had a law given him from God, and that law he fulfilled. Nor can I omit reiterating what his favourite disciple so much dwells upon, and which I cannot but consider as a strong confirmation of his religion: "he spake as never man spake," * and lived as never man lived.

To insist upon the miracles relative to Christ, would be to insist upon what would have but little effect upon the minds of anti-christians, who, if they believe not the religion, will certainly give no credit to the relation of the facts. But I may be permitted to insist upon the *undeniable truth*, that in the history of mankind, Christ is the only founder of a religion, who has been proved to have been totally regardless of interested and selfish considerations. All others, Numa, Mahommed, and even Moses himself, blended their religious institutions with their civil, and by them obtained dominion over their respective people; but Christ neither aimed at, nor would accept of any consequence or power; he rejected every object, which all other men pursue, and made choice of all those, which all other men fly from, and are afraid of; he refused authority, riches, honour, and pleasure;

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and

* St. John.

and courted poverty, ignominy, torture, and death. Who ever, before or after him, made his own sufferings and death a necessary part of his original plan, and fundamentally and absolutely essential to the success of his mission ?

Christ did not, like the philosophers of the heathens, content himself with scholastic speculations and reasonings about virtue and religion, and then leave the noble cause to fight for itself. He did not pretend to philosophize, where he dared not undertake. But, after he had introduced and recommended his divine system to the world; and that not only by the intrinsic sublime energy of his doctrines, upon the hearts and consciences of men, but by his immaculate and exemplary life, he died a martyr in its defence, and sealed its verity with his blood. Here then, surely, I might put the authority of Christ, and the credit of Christianity, to issue. Let any nation upon earth, besides Christians, make it appear, that the authors and founders of any of their several religions, did not in many instances give up the cause of virtue, to comply with the prevailing prejudices of the people, and to guard themselves in safety ; nay, that they did not intermix and blend the grossest absurdities in belief, with the grossest

grossest immoralities in practice; let them do this, and the name of Christ shall stoop to give place to any other name under heaven, that can plead a better title to the universal honour, love, and veneration of our species:

LETTER XCI.

OBJECTIONS against the evidences of Christianity are undoubtedly entitled to consideration, nor can they too seriously, or too candidly, be examined. For instance, it is asked, is the Christian religion contained in the books of the Old Testament, or did Moses and the prophets understand and teach the revealed doctrines of Christianity? No, I know it is answered, not clearly, explicitly, and literally; but darkly, obscurely, and under types and shadows. Literal Judaism was figurative Christianity; and literal Christianity is mystical Judaism; the letter of the law was the type of the gospel; and the letter of the gospel is the spirit of the law; the law was the gospel veiled; and the gospel is the law unveiled, and brightly illuminated. Moses was the shadow of Christ, and Christ is the substance of Moses. Now this forced and obscure method of harmonizing the law and the gospel, or the Old Testament and the New; together with a vast variety of other conceits, which confound common sense, and bewilder even

even penetrating understandings, are undoubtedly unbecoming, if not in reality, injurious.

“ It would be hard, indeed, upon Christians,” says a liberal prelate, * “ if they were compelled to receive, as apostolical traditions, the wild reveries of ancient enthusiasm, or such crude conceptions of ignorant fanaticism, as nothing but the rust of antiquity can render venerable. Cast your eye upon the church of Rome, and ask yourself, whether her absurd pretensions to miraculous powers have not converted one half of her members to protestantism, and the other half to infidelity ? Neither the sword of the civil magistrate, nor the possession of the keys of heaven, nor the terrors of her spiritual thunder, has been able to keep within her pale, even those who have been bred up in her faith.” But we may be asked, in what particular link, then, shall we break the chain of traditionary powers ? Every age bears testimony to wonderful events. Christians continued to support their pretensions long after they had lost their power, and thus credulity performed the office of faith ; fanaticism was permitted to assume the language of inspiration ; and the effects of accident

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or

* Bishop Watson.

or contrivance, were ascribed to supernatural causes. *

The influence of superstition is, indeed, considerable ; and credulous devotion acts most powerfully on the uninformed mind : and thus Hume's observation is just, touching the agreeable emotion produced by the passion of wonder and surprize, and the strong propensity there is in men to the extraordinary, and the marvellous. " It even forms," says he, " a very strong presumption against all supernatural relations, that they are always found chiefly to abound among ignorant and barbarous nations ; or if a civilized people have ever given admission to any of them, they have received them from ignorant or barbarous ancestors." †

But no presumption, as I think I have already proved, can be drawn from this circumstance, to the prejudice of Christianity ; which did not make its appearance in either an ignorant, or a barbarous age, but, on the contrary, at a time when the world was highly civilized, and among nations where arts and learning had made a very considerable progress. Let me further remark, that it had not only the inveterate prejudices of the

* Gibbon.

† Philosophical Essays.

the Romans and Jews, their darling passions, and inclinations, to contend with ; but also their pretended miracles, or, as Hume would call them, their extraordinary facts, received from their ancestors, to encounter, facts which had come handed down with all that inviolable sanction and authority, which always attend ancient and received opinions.

“ There is not to be found in all history, however,” says the same writer, “ any miracle attested by a sufficient number of men, of such unquestionable good sense, education, and learning, as to secure us against all delusion in themselves ; of such undoubted integrity, as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others ; of such credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind, as to have a great deal to lose, in case of being detected in any falsehood ; and, at the same time attesting facts performed in such a public manner, and in so celebrated a part of the world, as to render the detection unavoidable : all which circumstances are requisite to produce a full confidence in human testimony.” “ A miracle,” continues he, “ is a violation of the laws of nature ; and as a firm and unalterable experience hath established those laws, the proof against it, from the very nature

of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined. It is experience alone which gives authority to human testimony; and the same experience that assures us of the law of nature. When, therefore, these two kinds of experience are contrary, we have nothing to do but to subtract the one from the other. And this subtraction, with regard to all popular religions, amounts to an entire annihilation. Nay, whoever by faith is moved to assent to a miracle, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe whatever is most contrary to custom and experience."

Thus conclusive and dictatorial is Mr. Hume, whose unpresuming, and unoffending genius, you will remember, hath even merited a death-bed eulogium from himself. But let us for a moment examine how far this argument can support such a peculiar strain of confidence. I call it confidence, for no talents, no equanimity of mind, no suavity of manners, can authorize any man so far to deviate from decency and good sense, as to consign to contempt those who have ventured to declare a belief in God; or to hold up to ridicule the sole source of happiness

happiness to millions, and the pride and glory of men of learning and science; who, in point of understanding, have at least been equal, if not superior to all libertine philosophers. There is one observation which cannot but strike you. The proof arising from *experience*, though it is Mr. Hume's main pillar, amounts to this, and nothing more, that we learn from it what is conformable to the ordinary course and order of things; but we cannot learn from it that it is impossible things or events should happen, in any particular instance, contrary to that course. An event may happen, for instance, though it be contrary to the usual course of things, which cannot certainly, without absurdity, be said to be impossible, though there be no testimony whatever to support it. If it be possible, then, there is place for testimony. This testimony ought, indeed, to be so strong, and so circumstanced, as to make it reasonable for us to believe it: yet, if we have sufficient evidence to convince us, that such an event hath actually happened, however extraordinary or miraculous, surely no argument, drawn from experience, can prove it hath not happened.*

Miraculous

* Leland.

Miraculous nature, and absolute impossibility, are not synonymous terms. But we are told, God himself cannot effect a miracle : though almighty, it does not, upon that account, become a whit more probable ; since it is impossible for us to know the attributes or actions of such a being, otherwise than from the experience we have of his productions in the usual course of nature.* I have already shewn you, I think, the glaring absurdity of a fixed immutable fate, or of a blind necessity, erroneously called nature. But is it, indeed, the case, that he who contrived and fabricated the universe, or the no less wonderful frame of the human body, who originally suspended the planets in space, and gave the animated species a principle of life, cannot, if it be his will, restore even the dead to life ?

There was a time, when the matter that composes my body was as void of life as it will be, when it shall have lain twenty years in the grave ; when the elementary particles whereof my eye is made, could no more enable a percipient being to see, than they can now enable one to speak ; and when that which forms the substance of this hand, was as inert as a stone.

* Hume.

stone. Yet now, by the goodness of the Creator, the first lives, the last moves, and by means of the second, I perceive light and colours. And if Almighty Power can bring about all this gradually, by one particular succession of causes and effects, why may we not conceive the same power to perform it in an instant, and by the operation of other causes to us unknown? Or will the sceptic say, that he himself knows every possible cause, that can operate in the production of any effect? Or is he quite certain, there is no such thing in the universe as Almighty Power? *

Sound philosophy in the search of truth, requires us not, I confess, to give implicit faith to any opinion, however generally received, unless we can reconcile it to reason or strong probability. But, permit me to remark, the ways of God are not to be judged of according to the ways of man. We cannot reason upon the will and the power of an infinite and an incomprehensible Being, as we reason upon the will and the power of a finite and created being. Is it given us, to say to our Maker; We have submitted thy designs, thy attributes, thy very essence, to our feeble examination, and we boldly deny

* Beattie.

deny every thing which we neither hear, see, nor understand? Can this be ventured by an humble, or by a considerate enquirer? Is it not like the blind man, who should say, the sun cannot shine, because he cannot see him?

Metaphysicians of a certain class, like the hawk, seize upon a subject, and soar with it as high as they are able. They then, however, are constrained to let it fall, for it becomes too unwieldy for their grasp. Genuine metaphysics, I readily acknowledge, form the first point of general as well as of abstract knowledge. They spring with beauty in minds stored and cultivated with science. But, they always require deep preliminary information. It is not enough, that the dialectician can weave his web of intricate and perplexing argument. Arachnè herself committed a *felo de se*, in despair, and was changed into a spider by the Goddess of Wisdom. He must at least have more than a common acquaintance with the principles and the phænomena of physics, as well as metaphysics. It is indeed said, "*Quod volumus, facile credimus.*" But, this will not suffice. The true philosopher, like the impartial historian, in his investigations, must, indeed, be of no sect; but there is a medium between the blind zeal of a sectary and a total

total renunciation of principles, which have at least the sanction of age and authority. No really wise man will sacrifice the great interests of virtue, to the little interests of vanity. A cool head, and a clear judgment, are never seen to wanton in public distress: nor will sound integrity use the riches of the mind, as some do those of fortune, so perversely as to become a nuisance and a pest, rather than an ornament and support to society.

It is an excellence, and a great one too, says Locke, to have a real and true knowledge in all, or at least to have a taste of most of the objects of contemplation. The use even of a little insight into various parts of knowledge, is to accustom our minds to all sorts of ideas. This gives the mind a freedom in its operations. On the contrary, let a man be given up to the contemplation of any one single sort of knowledge, and that will incontinently become every thing to him. A metaphysician will bring plowing and gardening immediately to abstract notions: an alchymist will reduce divinity to the maxims of his laboratory, and allegorize the Scriptures into the philosopher's stone. And I heard once, continues he, a man who had more than ordinary excellency in music, seriously accom-

modate Moses's seven days of the first week, to the seven notes of music, as thence had been taken the measure and method of the creation:

In matters of fact, it is granted, we may govern ourselves by the testimony of others. But, in matters of speculation, to suppose on, as others have supposed before us, is little more, we are told, than to lend ourselves to learned ignorance, which may enable us to talk much, but inevitably to know little. Now, as I aim in this place in particular, at little more than matters of fact, may it not be permitted me to say, that it would be an horrible injustice, if it did not deserve the title of being most enormously ridiculous, to suppose that the happiness and misery of the human race ought to depend on the result of a few arguments, which nine-tenths of mankind are not capable of understanding? Many men's opportunities of knowledge are as slender as their fortunes. It cannot be expected, that he who drudges his life in a laborious trade or avocation, should have much better information concerning the variety of things passing in the world, than a horse, who is driven constantly forwards and backwards in a narrow lane, can be supposed to have in the geography of the country. The greatest part of mankind
are,

are, by the natural and unalterable state of things, unavoidably given over to invincible ignorance of those proofs, on which others build their opinions.*

But, men are evermore obstinate in what they have once assumed: whether it be a love of that which brought the first light and information into their minds; or whether, content with any appearance of knowledge, right or wrong, when they have once gained it, they hold it fast, and not unfrequently with an inveterate tenacity. Thus, says the celebrated philosopher I have just quoted, they are often as fond of their first conceptions as of their first born, and will by no means recede from the judgment they have once made. This, however, is a fault in the conduct of the understanding, and not in the principle of verity; since this firmness, or rather obstinacy of the mind, is not from a resolute adherence to truth, but from a tame submission to prejudice.

Truth can only get possession of our minds by the irresistible light of self-evidence, or by the force of demonstration. It can receive no validity from our passions, nor should it receive any

* Locke.

any tincture from our prejudices. But, as we are to deal with one another, and live in community, how clear in its advantage is the law of universal morality ! If this man were to act by one law, and that man by another, how easy it is to see, that endless clashings and mischiefs would arise. No trial can be had, nor can a judge determine in any cause, but upon a common law, which parties at both sides can understand, and to which they submit by agreement. The sentiments and reasonings of mankind are invariably different ; in some they are clear and strong, in others, weak and ill formed ; and on this account they are forced to form themselves into societies, and to determine what shall be their common law.

The individual, then, may be found sometimes to say one thing, while the public say another. But private reason can never have a claim to legislative wisdom. No faculty or pretension in an individual, can authorise him, singly, to become lawgiver to another. We know enough, indeed, to direct us in the management of ourselves, although there be secrets within us, which it is as impossible for us to comprehend, as it is for a circle to encompass itself. And therefore, it has always appeared to be

be a good observation of Bruyere, that however dissatisfied a man may be with his immediate portion of riches, power, or other good things, he yet is always thoroughly well satisfied with the stock of sense and understanding with which he hath been gifted.

But to return to Mr. Hume. In the following essays, says he, I have endeavoured to throw light upon some subjects, from which uncertainty had hitherto deterred the wise, and obscurity the ignorant. I propose to unite the boundaries of the different species of philosophy, by reconciling profound enquiry with clearness, and truth with novelty. And, it will be happy, if reasoning in this easy manner, "I can undermine the foundation of an abstruse philosophy, which seems to have served hitherto only as a shelter to superstition, and a cover to absurdity and error."* Observe the consequence, which incredulity confers. To refuse credit, even for the instant, induces an appearance of superiority; and nothing is so cheaply gained; for it is only withdrawing attention from evidence, and declining the fatigue of comparing probabilities.†

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To

* Philosoph. Essays.

† Johnson.

To endeavour to answer declamation by argument, is labouring to lay hold on that which has nothing real in it, and is literally wasting strength upon unembodied air. Formerly it was the business of philosophers, to give us a due veneration for the dignity of human nature; they described it as it really was, beneficent, brave, and a lover of its species. But, all this we are now given to understand, is chimerical; that the notion was invented by crafty knaves, to make dupes of the young, the vain, and the ambitious; that nature has confined us to the all sufficient sphere of self love; and that our most pompous boasts of a generous disinterestedness, are but the artful disguises of that passion. Let egotism have its votaries. But, what spirited or honourable man would have it said of him, "*Ortus erat e salice, non e quercu?*" You would not, I am certain.

That constitution must be depraved, which converts aliment into poison; and the eye cannot be sound which day light dazzles into blindness. Not less depraved, nor less unsound, must that understanding be, which perverts knowledge into unbelief, and becomes ignorant of God, in proportion as the world becomes enlightened

lightened with an insight into his works. It is a shorter way, indeed, as I have said, to a great reputation, to object than to defend; to pull down, than to set up. But, tell me, how can a good man, in the sober hours of reflection, answer it to his conscience to have rendered contemptible a system, which gives to virtue its sweetest hopes, to impenitent vice its greatest fears, and to true penitence its best consolation; which restrains even the least approaches to guilt, and yet makes those allowances for the infirmities of our nature, which the Stoic pride denied to it, but which its real imperfection, and the goodness of its Creator require? To endeavour thus to shake the foundations, on which I cannot but conceive the whole moral world, and the great fabric of social happiness entirely rests, is a mischief levelled at human society, which no scepticism can warrant, and for which no ability can apologize.*

Even, as I have frequently repeated, supposing the evidences of the Christian religion doubtful, what right has any individual to rob a whole people of its happiness? This would be a new species of tyranny. Can we then, in fact, in any manner respect that spirit of philosophizing,

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which

* Lord Lyttleton.

which hath lately stepped in; which daily, I may say, thunders even in the writings of our historians; and which, by encouraging, among other unworthy licences, an indifference concerning character and conduct, levels all moral distinctions, unnerves the indignation of the mind against vice, and damps the enthusiasm of its reverence for virtue. History ought always, surely, to assume the tone of exulting justice; especially, when she immolates, at the shrine of oppressed virtue, and violated right, a wretched offering, the memory of towering wickedness.*

Directed to good ends, brilliant writings are like the lights hung in a pharos, to guide poor mariners safe through a tempestuous sea. But, directed to impiety, and consequent immorality, they shine only to betray, and lead men unsuspectingly to destruction. By arguments, indeed, really strong against superstition, enthusiasm, and priestcraft, freethinkers recommend themselves to ingenuous minds, by whom imposition is held in abhorrence. And here it would be an honour to themselves, and a service to mankind, were they to stop. But an unbridled love of singularity, pushes them on; and they fatally never advert to the mischiefs they occasion, while they impose upon

* Eng. Rev.

upon incapacity, and give a sanction to licentiousness in minds ungoverned by reflection,—unguided by reason and experience.

But, it is asked, if the religion of Christ had been literally dictated by the spirit of God, and supported by miracles, why is it not still proved to us by a like spirit of God, and reconfirmed to us by a repetition of miracles? And why are not its mysteries made as clear to our conviction, as they were to the conviction of the Apostles? To such questions, as I am but a common man, I can give but a common answer. The God of nature, acts without either my privacy or concurrence, and as to him seemeth best. But at the same time, it does not appear to me at all more extraordinary, that the Creator of all things should conceal from me, who am ignorant of causation in every thing, those supernatural proofs of Christianity which are demanded, than it is that he should withhold from me the manifestation of those proofs, by which the various parts of terrestrial nature are attracted and linked together. The fruits of the earth, are wholesome and necessary to our being. Yet, I am ignorant of what they were in the beginning. With their beauty and their salubrious properties, I am, indeed, acquainted. But, God

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would

would be under the necessity of working miracles, to make fully known to me their principles and their causes. I see in them effects, but I see nothing else ; yet such effects as even Hume would not venture to deny, though his experience could not carry him to their causes. May it not, therefore, be sufficient for us to have the blessings of Christianity, as we have many other blessings, by transmission. Once planted and flourishing, what need of fruitlessly recurring to the original germ ? Speaking even from analogy, may not the spirit be as incomprehensibly nourished as the body ? When effects are good, when they have stood the test of ages, and baffled even the rancour of persecution ; when they have diffused universal and unequivocal happiness, even in defiance of all the malice of infidelity, why should we not be satisfied, and rest our comfort and our belief, in the grateful acknowledgment of an heavenly descent and a divine original ?

It is not my design here to enter into an examination of miracles, as relative to Christianity, or of such other matters as have, do, and most probably will continue to cause differences of opinion. For instance, whether the Son was consubstantial, *ὁμοουσιος* or of the same nature with the Father ; or whether he was, *ὁμοιωσιος*, of a similar nature to the Father. Some have

have considered Christ, you will remember, simply as a man, the son of Joseph and Mary, the Messiah of the Jews; others as a super-angelic spirit, either superadded to the miraculously incarnate man, or assuming only the appearance of one; and others, that he consisted of a body and soul, like other men, but had superadded the very Logos of the Supreme Being, a principle, uncreated, and properly divine. My presumption, however, does not lead me so far as to determine on such questions, or to hazard an opinion of what specific nature, or natures, Christ was. It is my best interest, I conceive, to aim only at the comprehension of what he did, and what he taught, either as the Son, the Prophet, or the Messenger from God.

The most sagacious of the first Christian theologians, the learned Athanasius himself, has candidly confessed, whenever he forced his understanding to meditate on the divinity of the Logos, his toilsome and unavailing efforts recoiled on themselves; that the more he thought, the less he comprehended; and the more he wrote, the less capable was he of expressing his thoughts. The controversy about the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son was of the same incomprehensible nature. Yet, this

doctrine, though established by the council of Nice, was dissented from, and much rigour was used against those who were in consequence of it, denominated Heretics.

Thus, while they were contented, says a learned writer, with the words of Scripture, that Christ was *of God*, or from God, *ex Deo*, there was no division on the question; but when they added to this, by way of explanation, and required it to be believed, that he was *ex the same substance* *ex Deo*, of or from the substance of God, they divided into sects, and murdered one another. When they attempted to explain what they meant by the words, *out of* the substance of God, they subdivided. And this must always be inevitably the effect of the imposition of human comments, on disputed texts. How absurd is it, indeed, to expect an union of opinion upon every passage, or upon every letter! When Christ preached to the common people, does he appear to have expected them to have had clear conceptions on metaphysical subjects, or only to be equal to the understanding of plain practical truths?*

It is not the privilege of the human intellect, to be the judge of the causes, or the effects of the

* Taylor's Apology of Ben. Mordecai.

the divine conduct. The most common things in nature are not to be accounted for *à priori*. The existence of animals, is as miraculous as the existence of Christ. Moreover, the Jews had one very peculiar characteristic as relative to the Messiah, that when he came, "No man should know whence he was." At the same time, I acknowledge, if the ground on which the miraculous conception rests, be sapped, the temptation, the transfiguration, the resurrection, and the ascension, may all, in a great degree, totter to their foundation. But, seriously, are not such discussions more likely to engage petulant controversy, than to ensure present or future felicity? Had God designed, that the precise nature of the dispensation should ever have been understood by his creatures, he would most undoubtedly have precluded all necessity of disputation.

We have said, man must have been created; for, had he been eternal, there could have been no succession. Now, is one creation more surprising than another? The first man could not have come by the way of generation. It may be answered, indeed, perhaps, that the first man was created according to the general laws of nature. But, by what laws of nature were
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the sun, moon, and earth, brought into existence? Why do not these laws of nature, thus acting incessantly on determined principles, produce other suns, and moons, and habitable orbs? In the unoccupied space of our solar system, there is ample room for the laws of nature to display their uniform and unceasing operations; and yet, strange to tell, the history of the world does not furnish one solitary instance of their prolific energies. The orbs in the great system are materially, locally, and numerically, excepting those lately brought to our acquaintance by Herschel, the orbs which were noticed by astronomers three thousand years ago.

It is not my intent either to enter into the reasonings of Unitarians, or Trinitarians. There are strong arguments on both sides. And both the one belief and the other have been supported by men as able, as upright, and as disinterested as the world ever saw. In truth, no advantage is gained to true religion, as far as I can perceive, by tenaciously maintaining either that an Unitarian is a Deist, or that a Trinitarian is a Polytheist. No culpable timidity here induces me to be overawed by the authority of
great

great names. I speak as I feel. The heavenly gifted man of the Unitarians is as unoffending, in my apprehension, to common sense, as the more immaculate and immediate divinity of the Trinitarians.

Even an acknowledgment of three powers, persons, or intelligencies, in the one Deity, though it be a mystery far above the apprehension of our finite understandings, yet may very innocently be allowed to those who chuse to follow deductions, originally, perhaps, taken from appearances in created beings. Examine, for instance, the little microcosm, man, and you will find three distinct powers in his nature: one power of intelligence, by which he thinks, reasons, and reflects; which he conceives to be absolutely free from matter, form, or figure, and suitable to the idea he entertains of the immortal Deity: another power of self motion and perception, by which he moves his bodily organs, and by means of his senses perceives the beings without him: and a third power, of which, indeed, he has not the sole direction, though it be in some manner subservient to his other faculties, the plastic or plantal power, by which he vegetates and enlarges, or varies his form. Thus analogically may be conceived the complex idea of the eternal mind.

"Is it possible," says Voltaire, "to know that which is not in being?" It is possible, for there have been things which are not, and are they not known to have had being? Man speaks, at all times, according to feeble and limited powers. But he who can foresee, can fore-ordain; and he who made the world of Christians, could as easily have made the divine founder of their religion. Knowledge is rightly divided by Locke, into intuitive, sensitive, and demonstrative. It is clear, I confess, that a past miracle can neither be the object of sense, nor of intuition, nor consequently of demonstration; and of course, philosophically speaking, we cannot be said to know that such a miracle actually did happen. But in all the great and general concerns of life, are we not more frequently influenced by probability than by knowledge; and of probability, does not the same great author establish two foundations, a conformity to our own experience, and the testimony of others?

It is contended, that by the opposition of these two principles, probability is destroyed; or in other terms, that human testimony can never influence the mind to assent to a proposition repugnant to uniform experience. But may not
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such a reasoner be asked, whose experience do you mean? You will not say your own; for the experience of an individual reaches but a little way; and no doubt you daily assent to a thousand truths in politics, in physics, and in the business of common life, which you have never seen verified by experience. Neither will you appeal to the experience of your friends; for that can extend itself but a little way beyond your own. By uniform experience, then, you understand the experience of all ages and nations, since the foundation of the world. *

Now let us see first, how it is that you become acquainted with the experience of all ages and nations. From history you say. Be it so. Turn to your books, and peruse by far the most ancient records of antiquity; and if you find no mention of miracles in them, I give up the point. Yes; but every thing related therein, respecting miracles, is to be reckoned fabulous. Why? Because miracles contradict the experience of all nations and ages. Do you not perceive you here beg the very question in debate? For I affirm, the great and learned nation of Egypt, the heathen inhabiting the land of Canaan, the numerous people of the Jews, and the nations which

* Bishop Watson.

which for ages surrounded them, have all, from their history, had experience of miracles. In a word, you cannot in any other way obviate the conclusion of miracles appertaining to Christianity, than by questioning the authenticity of that book, concerning which no less a man than Newton, when he was writing his commentary on Daniel, expresses himself, "I find more sure marks of authenticity in the Bible than in any profane history whatsoever."

In the second place, the principle by which you reject miracles, leads to absurdity. The laws of gravitation are the most obvious of all the laws of nature ; every person, in every part of the globe, must of necessity have had experience of them. There was a time, when no one was acquainted with the laws of magnetism ; these suspend, in many instances, the laws of gravity : nor can I see, upon the principle in question, how the rest of mankind could have credited the testimony of their first discoverer ; and yet to have rejected it would have been to reject the truth. But that a piece of iron should ascend gradually from the earth, and fly at last, with an increasing rapidity through the air, and, attaching itself to another piece of iron, or to a particular species of iron ore, should remain suspended

pended in opposition to the action of its gravity, is consonant to the laws of nature. I grant it; but there was a time when it was contrary, I say, not to the laws of nature, but to the uniform experience of all preceding ages and countries; and at that particular point of time, the testimony of an individual, or of a dozen individuals, who should have reported themselves eye witnesses of such a fact, ought, according to your argument, to have been received as fabulous. *

But what are those laws of nature which you think can never be suspended? Are they not different to different men, according to the diversities of their comprehension and knowledge? And if any one of them should have been known to you, or to me alone, while all the rest of the world were unacquainted with it, the effect of it would have been new, and unheard of in the annals, and contrary to the experience of mankind, and, therefore, ought not in your opinion to be believed. Nor do I understand what difference, as to credibility, there could be between the effects of such an unknown law of nature, and a miracle: for it is a matter of no moment in that view, whether the suspension of the known

known laws of nature be effected, that is, whether a miracle be performed, by the mediation of other laws that are unknown, or by the ministry of a person divinely commissioned; since it is impossible for us to be certain, that it is contradictory to the constitution of the universe, that the laws of nature, which appear to us general, should not be suspended, and their action overruled by others, still more general; though less known; that is, that miracles should not be performed before such a being as man, at those times, in those places, and under those circumstances, which God, in his universal providence, had pre-ordained.*

But miracles entirely out of the question. In the days of heathenism, the most sacred and the most pure of the religious rites of antiquity were performed on altars, erected to mortals who had enlightened and benefited mankind. The wisest, the bravest, and the greatest characters assisted at these ceremonies with reverence and gratitude. With a general voice they poured forth their praises and their adoration: they cherished the memory of the good; they held their instructors in veneration. Is it to be classically consistent and dignified, then, I would ask

* Watson's Letters to Gibbon.

ask the infallible expounders of the book of nature, to take a diametrically opposite line of conduct. Even supposing Christ to have been a mere human instructor, is his name, as the dispenser of the most invaluable and unheard of blessings, not to be honoured and worthily treated, at least in an equal degree with the names of Ceres or Minerva? "We celebrate you," says Herodotus, speaking of a certain tutelary divinity, "without knowing what appellation to give you. The Pythia, indeed, doubted whether you were divine or mortal. Whichever be the case, we in our uncertainty, at least, can style you the friend of God; for you, in numberless instances, have been the friend of man, and thence it is our duty to worship you with honour, and we do it with the utmost cheerfulness of heart."

LETTER XCII.

MOST of the writers, who have undertaken to prove the divine origin of Christianity, have had recourse to arguments drawn from three heads : the prophecies still extant in the Old Testament ; the miracles recorded in the New ; and the internal evidence arising from that excellence, and those clear marks of supernatural interposition, which are so conspicuous in the religion itself. The two former have been sufficiently explained and enforced by the ablest pens ; but the latter, which seems to carry with it, if not the most satisfactory, at least the most simple kind of conviction, has not altogether been considered with that attention, which it appears to deserve. *

My meaning here, you are well convinced, is far from being to depreciate the proofs arising from either prophecies or miracles : they are both of great weight in the general argument.

Prophecies

* Jenyn's Intern. Evid.

Prophecies are permanent miracles, whose authority is sufficiently confirmed by their completion, and are, therefore, solid proofs of the supernatural origin of a religion, whose truth they were intended to testify; such as those which I have already mentioned to be found in various parts of the Scriptures relative to the coming of the Messiah, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the unexampled state, in which the Jews have ever since continued; all so circumstantially descriptive of the events, that they seem rather histories of past, than predictions of future transactions. And whoever will seriously consider the immense distance of time between some of them, and the events which they foretell; the uninterrupted chain, by which they are connected for many thousand years; how exactly they correspond with those events, and how totally unapplicable they are to all other events in the history of mankind; I say, whoever considers these circumstances, will scarcely be persuaded to believe they can be the productions of preceding artifice, or posterior application, or can entertain the least doubt of their being derived from supernatural inspiration.

In the next place, the doctrines of this religion are equally new with the object; and contain

ideas of God and of man, of the present, and of a future life ; and of the relations which all these bear to each other, totally unheard of, and quite dissimilar from any which had ever been thought of, previous to its publication. No other ever drew so just a portrait of this world, and its pursuits, nor exhibited such distinct, lively, and exquisite pictures of the joys of another ; of the resurrection of the dead ; the last judgment, and the triumphs of the righteous in that tremendous day, “ When this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality.”* No other has ever attempted to reconcile those seemingly contradictory, but both true propositions, the contingency of future events, and the fore-knowledge of God ; or the free will of the creature, with the over-ruling grace of the Creator. No other has so fully declared the certainty of punishment to wickedness, yet so effectually instructed individuals to resist the one, and to escape the other. In short, the whole is so far removed from every tract of the human imagination, that it seems utterly impossible it should ever have been derived from the knowledge, or the artifice of man.†

Many

* 1 Corinthians.

† Jeayne.

Many of the ancients, it may be said, believed in a future state, even long before the coming of Christ. True, they did so. But what were their ideas of a future state even in the Augustan age? Cicero,—(and to what higher authority can we appeal?) shall answer for the rest. In his oration for Cluentius, he makes mention of an abandoned miscreant, who had forged I know not how many wills; murdered I know not how many wives; and perpetrated a thousand other villainies; yet, even to this profligate, by name Oppianicus, he is persuaded death was not the occasion of any evil. “*Nam nunc quidem quid tandem mali illi mors attulit? Nisi forte ineptiis ac fabulis ducimur, ut existememus apud inferos impiorum supplicia perferre, ac plures illic offendisse inimicos quam hic reliquisse, quæ si falsa sint, id quod omnes intelligunt, &c.*” Even those who had some sort of idea of a future state, had no manner of expectation of such a life, as included in it the severity of punishment denounced in the Christian scheme against the wicked.*

But Cicero was right, it is said. For is it not an absurdity to talk of a future state, where every proceeding is to be the reverse of what it is

at the present ; where every individual human creature is to be tried ; his most secret actions, nay, the very thoughts of his heart are to be laid open ; and where sentence is to be pronounced accordingly.* Such an existence can be consistently ascribed to no principle, but to the revenge of a being who punishes to the full extent of his power, without any regard to justice, and merely for the pleasure of punishing creatures who did not sin for the sake of offending him ; creatures who had free will, and made wrong elections ; creatures who might plead in mitigation of their punishments, their frailties, their passions, the imperfections of their natures, and the numerous temptations, to which they stood exposed.†—But is not this miserably to apologize for sin ? Were passions and temptations in this manner to be admitted as a sufficient excuse, even between man and man in this world, the most enormous crimes, and the greatest wickedness, would universally and incessantly be practised.

The Jews, says the same writer, blended together, in the moral character of God, injustice, cruelty, and partiality. But the Christians go still farther, and represent him as waiting to punish

* Bolingbroke.

† Id.

punish hereafter with unrelenting vengeance and eternal torments, when it is even too late to terrify, because it is too late to reform. But what is, let me demand, the true source of all this angry declamation? Could Bolingbroke, or any of his disciples, ever point out an instance of any unbeliever, who, to be more at his ease, in the gratification of his desires, had professed himself a Christian; or a real Christian, who, to be more resolute in the principles of virtue, had become an unbeliever? No. It is not then that they are dissatisfied with the evidences of a future state; they are only dissatisfied with morality, or, to speak more tenderly, with the restraints on the passions, which alone can lead to an happy immortality. One of the initiated, indeed, candidly so expresses it. He aims, he says, "to save a soul from the dismal apprehensions of eternal damnation; to relieve a person from labouring under that uneasiness of mind, which he often is under, when pleasure and Christianity come in competition."*

But is it not whimsical, if, on so serious a subject, it does not deserve a harsher epithet, that the two authors, who have appeared most against Christianity, should be the very authors

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* Letters from a Deist

who have been, from reason, the most inclined to acknowledge the great usefulness of religion, and, in an especial manner, of that part of it which relates to future rewards and punishments? Mr. Hume, speaking of the received notion, that the Deity will inflict punishments on vice, and infinite rewards on virtue, says, "Those who attempt to disabuse men of such prejudices, may, for ought he knows, be good reasoners, but he cannot allow them to be good citizens and politicians; since they free them from one restraint upon their passions, and make the infringement of the laws of equity and society, in one respect, more easy and secure."* Lord Bolingbroke again, speaking of those who contrived religion for the sake of government, observes, "They saw that the public external religion would not answer their end, nor enforce effectually the obligations of virtue and morality, without the doctrine of future rewards and punishments." And he concludes, "the doctrine of rewards and punishments in a future state has so great a tendency to enforce the civil laws, and to restrain the vices of men, that reason, which cannot decide for it on principles of natural theology, will not decide against it on principles of good policy. The conflict between
virtue

* Philosophical Essays.

virtue and vice in the great commonwealth of mankind is such, that were it not regulated by religious and civil institutions, the human life would be intolerable." Nay, he further is compelled to admit, that "no religion ever appeared in the world, whose natural tendency was so much directed to promote the peace and happiness of mankind, as the Christian religion, considered as taught by Christ and his Apostles."

It would be waste of time to animadvert on such unequivocal concessions, reluctantly extorted by the force of evidence from the very bosom of infidelity itself. Let us then quit such inconsistent, though in various instances, I allow, most formidable adversaries in the field of argument. Our next inquiries call us a different way.

There is no bias in human nature more prevalent, than a desire to anticipate futurity. In dark ages, that desire was always indulged without reserve. Hence omens, auguries, dreams, judicial astrology, oracles, and predictions. It is, however, sufficiently evident, that foreknowledge of such a kind, could it be procured, would be a gift more pernicious to man, than Pandora's box. It would deprive him of every motive to
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action; and leave no place for sagacity, nor for the contrivance of means for the accomplishment of ends. Life, if I may be permitted to say it, would be cheated thus of its best rights. At present it is as an enchanted castle, that gives play to passions, and exercise to reason: remove the veil that hides futurity, and suddenly the fabric vanishes. To open our eyes, would only be to submit to our inspection an uncircumscribed and incomprehensible confusion. Anxiety about futurity, on the contrary, rouses our sagacity to prepare for what may happen; but an eagerness to know what sagacity cannot discover, is a weakness in nature, inconsistent with every rational consideration.

Another source of error is, that singular tendency in man to mysteries and hidden meanings. The busy mind is seldom satisfied with the simple and obvious signification. When the object makes a deep impression, invention is roused to allegorize; and subtlety is set to work, to pierce into hidden views and purposes. A strange, or an unaccountable event animates the attention, and inflames the mind. This even displays itself in childhood. Stories of ghosts and apparitions are anxiously listened to, and firmly believed even by means of the very terror they occasion.

casian. But what article of good sense or faith, let me ask, could ever prove, that the dead preserve any kind of connexion with the living ; or are ever suffered, either in spirit or in body, to return to this world ? I know of no solid evidence of such a fact ; nor did I ever hear of such wonderful commerce or visitations, except in mischievous tales calculated to amuse and terrify the weak and timid.

The doctrine of prognostics is undoubtedly then founded upon a supposition, that future events are unalterably fixed ; for otherwise such a doctrine would appear absurd, even to the most ignorant. The Greeks had their oracles ; the Romans had their augurs ; and all the world have had their omens. Oracles and augurs, however, were evidently reared upon the belief of tutelar deities ; but the influence of the latter (and I particularly refer to it here as relative to Christianity) was, if possible, still more preposterous, as it was still more unpardonable. The instances are innumerable ; many are even of recent renown. Having gained the battle of St. Quintin on the festival of St. Laurence, Philip reckoned himself obliged to the Saint for the victory ; and accordingly he not only built the monastery he had vowed, but also a church
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for the saint, and a palace for himself, all under one roof; and what is not a little beyond common extravagancy, the edifice he built in resemblance of a gridiron, which, according to the legend, was the instrument of St. Laurence's martyrdom.

"It is peculiar to the Germans," says Tacitus, "to deduce presages from horses. These animals are maintained at the public expence, in groves and forests, and are not allowed to be polluted with any work for the use of man; but being yoked in the sacred chariot, the priest and the king, or chief of the state, attend them, and carefully observe their neighings. The greatest faith is given to this method of augury, both among the vulgar and the nobles."* Napier, inventor of the logarithms, scarcely half a century ago, found the day of judgment predicted in the Revelations; and named the very day; which he yet, however, very unfortunately survived. The famous Jurieu, more hardy still, went yet further in his explanations. The beast in the Apocalypse, who held the *Poculum aureum plenum abominationum*, he very civilly demonstrated to be the pope; and his reason was, that the initial letters of these four Latin words

compose

* De Moribus Germanorum.

compose the word *papa*. A very singular prophecy, undoubtedly! A prophecy in Latin, but in no other language, not even in that in which the Apocalypse was written!

The instances of human imbecility are, indeed, not to be enumerated. Be this, however, as it may, religion of every description, we are told, is incontestibly founded on fatalism. Among the Greeks, it was held, that men were punished for faults, which they were fated to commit, as is evident in Orestes, Oedipus, &c. who merely did what had formally been announced by the oracle. Even Christianity is said to have made vain efforts to justify the Divinity, in throwing the faults of men on their free-will, which is never to be reconciled with predestination. Even the system of grace cannot obviate the difficulty; seeing that God gives grace only to whom he pleases. The foundations of all systems, then, are the fatal decrees of a being irresistible, who decides arbitrarily, and who awards eternally. If God be infinitely good, we are asked, why should we fear him? If he be omniscient, why tell him of our wants, and fatigue him with our prayers? If he be every where, why disquiet ourselves about our lot, and erect churches and temples

temples to him? If he be merciful, why be in wrath against frail beings, to whom he has granted the liberty to deviate from reason? If he be immutable, in what manner can we make him alter his decrees? If he be inconceivable, why do we strive to gain a conception of him? If he hath spoken, why is not the whole universe convinced? If the knowledge of the one God be above all things the most necessary, why is it not of all things the most evident, and the most clear?*

There is a moment, when some suspension of common affairs, some pause of temporal pain and pleasure, is peculiarly necessary to him who deliberates for eternity; who is forming the only plan, in which miscarriage cannot be repaired, and examining the only question in which mistake cannot be rectified.† The gratification of the appetites fill but a small portion of time, and these appetites themselves are weakened by every attempt to encrease the enjoyment they are intended to supply. Who then would doze away life in an hopeless indifference, who had the power to exalt himself into felicity? The gamester, of whatever class, plays against manifest odds. He starts with a stake, which at one time, perhaps, did, and still might,

* Systeme de la Nature.

† Johnson.

might have made him happy. He hazards it on the dye. He wins, but he discovers his gains to be brass : he loses ; that which he parts with is gold ; and reason, as well as imagination, heightens what has become irrecoverable.

The spirituality of our being, we have had much occasion to dilate upon already. We have proved it irrefragably, I think, even to the conviction of captiousness itself. For what clearer? Though a scarcely discernible atom in the immensity of the universe, yet man has powers which spurn the narrow boundaries of time and place, soar beyond the sphere of his existence, penetrate the secret laws of nature, and calculate their progressive effects. But, let us bestow one moment more, I beseech you, on a subject so peculiarly interesting, and which involves, consequently, not only the distinct nature of immateriality, but, more especially the operations of human liberty, and I must add, however, in opposition to fashionable Necessitarians, the dictates, in my opinion, of common sense.

Leibnitz demands whether God, in creating the world, must necessarily have created the best world ; and whether this world be so in effect ? Whether it be or be not, it is idle to ask ; for
who

who can furnish us with the demonstration? We can have no positive knowledge, further than we have ideas. Hence the extent of our knowledge not only falls short of the reality of things, but even of the extent of our own perceptions. We have the ideas of a square, a circle, and equality; and yet, perhaps, shall never be able to find a circle equal to a square. The real belief in a Supreme Being, affords, when duly considered, sufficient foundation for duty, right action, and morality. For if there be no property, there can be no injustice; if there be no government, there can be no restraint: and yet, we are required to believe that there is no such thing as free will.

When we consider the vast distance of the known and visible parts of the world, and the reasons we have to think what lies within our grasp, is but a small part of the immense universe, we shall then discover within ourselves an huge mass of ignorance. What the particular fabrics of the great volumes of matter which make up the whole stupendous frame of corporeal beings are, how far they are extended, what is their motion, how continued, and, what influence they have upon one another; are contemplations that at the first glimpse plunge us into inextricable confusion.

fusion. If we confine our view, again, on a lesser scale, to the little system of our sun, and the attendant bodies that visibly move about it; what several sorts of vegetables, animals, and corporeal intellectual beings, infinitely different from those of our appropriate spot the earth, may there not probably be in other planets, to the knowledge of which, even of their outward figures and parts, we can no way attain; for we have no natural means, either by sensation or reflection, of acquiring ideas concerning them.

There are, on the other hand, other bodies in the universe no less concealed from us by their minuteness. These imperceptible corpuscles being the active parts of matter, and the great instruments of nature, on which depend all their secondary qualities and operations, our want of distinct ideas of their primary qualities keeps us in incurable ignorance of what we desire to know about them. Did we know the mechanical affections of opium, we might as easily account for its operation in causing sleep, as a watch-maker can for the motion of his watch. The dissolving of silver in aqua fortis, or gold in aqua regia, and not vice versa, would be then, perhaps, no more difficult to comprehend than it would be to a mechanic to understand,

why the turning of one key shall open one lock, and not another. Thus, while we are destitute of senses, acute enough to discern the minute particles of bodies, and to give us ideas of their mechanical affections, we must be content to be ignorant of their properties and operations. And this, at once, shews us, how disproportionate our knowledge is to the whole extent even of material beings. The operation of our own minds upon our own bodies, is inconceivable. How any thought should produce a motion in the body, is as remote from our conception, as how any figure should produce any thought in the mind.

We have the knowledge of our own existence by consciousness; of the existence of God by demonstration; and of that of other things, by sensation. Man has a clear perception of his own being. He knows certainly he exists, and that he is something. In the next place, he knows, by an intuitive certainty, that bare nothing can no more produce any real being, than it can be equal to two right angles. If, therefore, we know that there is some real being, it is incontrovertibly evident, that from eternity there has been something; since, what has not from eternity had a beginning, must be produced by something

something else. Next, it is evident, that what has its being from another, must also have all that which is in, and belongs to, its being from another too: all the power it has, must be owing to and received from the same source. This eternal source then, of all being, must be also the source and original of all power; and so this Eternal Being must be also the most powerful.

Again, man finds in himself perception and knowledge. We are certain, then, there is not only some being, but some knowing, intelligent being in the universe. There was a time, consequently, when there was no knowing being, or else there has been a knowing being from eternity. If it be said, there was a time when that Eternal Being had no knowledge, the reply is, that then it is impossible there should have ever been any knowledge; it being as impossible, that things wholly void of knowledge, and operating blindly, and without any perception, should produce a knowing being, as it is, that two and three should make four. Thus, we have a more certain knowledge of the existence of a God, than of any thing our senses have not immediately discovered to us; nay, we more certainly know

there is a God, than that there is any thing else without us.

Thus circumstanced, then, are we to consider the volitions and actions of men, as *free*, or as *necessary*? Are we unavoidably compelled to what we do; or have we the power of choice, from the vital energy of the mind? Here I answer without difficulty; and without hesitation, embrace the doctrine of liberty; that liberty which men have commonly esteemed their noblest privilege, and of which they have fancied themselves undoubtedly possessed. Shall I subscribe to a contrary reasoning, which would prove a murderer to be as necessarily determined to commit murder, as a stone is to fall by gravity? Yet, at the same time, I confess, if there be any thing obscure or difficult in philosophy, it is in that part which treats of elections and liberty. There is no point, in fact, about which the learned have been more divided; nor is it an easy matter even to understand them, or to give a certain and true representation of their opinions.*

Human freedom is called, by Doctor Priestley, absurd and dangerous. Collins, whose book on the

* King's Origin of Evil.

the subject the Doctor also wishes reprinted, says it is atheistical. Mr. J. Edwards, whom the Doctor likewise recommends as unanswerable, has these remarkable expressions: "All the Arminians on earth might be challenged, without arrogance, to make these principles of theirs consistent with common sense, yea, and perhaps to produce any doctrine ever embraced by the blindest bigot of the church of Rome, or the most ignorant Mussulman, or extravagant enthusiast, that might be reduced to more and more demonstrable inconsistencies and repugnancies, to common sense, and to themselves; though their inconsistencies may not, indeed, lie so deep, or be so artfully veiled, by a deceitful ambiguity of words, and an indeterminate signification of phrases."*

I hold it to be an intuitive proposition, a Necessitarian will argue, that the Deity is the primary cause of all things; that with consummate wisdom he formed the great plan of government, which he carries on by laws suited to the different natures of animate and inanimate beings; and that these laws produce a regular chain of causes and effects, in the moral as well

as in the material world, admitting no events but what are comprehended in the original plan. Hence, chance is excluded out of this world; nothing can happen by accident; and "no event is arbitrary or contingent."* But I will not again trouble you about these words, chance and contingency. When we say a thing has happened by chance, we do not mean surely that chance was the cause; for no person ever thought chance to be a thing that can act or produce events: we only mean, we are ignorant of the cause, and that, for ought we see, it might have happened or not happened, or happened differently. The same of contingency: there is no such thing in nature as contingency; or in other words, a sense that any thing happens without a cause: such a sense would be grossly delusive.†

An argument of an indirect kind, indeed, in behalf of philosophical necessity, is sometimes built upon the certainty of the Divine prescience, supposing that what is foreseen must, merely on that account, be predetermined or necessary. This is done more particularly by those who contend, that matter, fitly organized,
can

* Essays on Morality and Natural Religion.

• Kaim's Sketches of man.

can think, and that the whole of man is nothing but matter. And the conclusion is certainly inevitable; for mechanism is the immediate consequence of materialism.* But, the most leading argument of all, in the doctrine, is, that nothing can be free, that is not independent of all influence and connection.

Were it not proved by fact, one would scarcely have imagined a philosopher should have entertained the supposition, that it could be made a question, whether man be free; and at the same time should have thought that what is free, must be wholly independent and unconnected. For such a detachedness, as it may be called, it is plainly as vain to seek, as it is evidently incompatible with the nature of things. For whatever exists, must have some kind of relation to some other thing, and be in some sort under its influence. There is an universal concatenation, which, however, by no means denies to individuals qualities and powers, really distinct and appropriate. The contrary assumption would be, in truth, as if we should expect the wind to blow, and yet in no direction. For why may there not be a free connection, as well as a necessary connection? Substance is ma-

terial and immaterial. Quantity is positive and negative. Space and duration have qualities of finite and infinite. Why may not the will then be governed by motives of a counter species, in forming a free connection?*

This considered, is it not making a very bold, if not altogether an unphilosophical inference, to say at once, as some do, that because the will is actuated by motives, it must therefore be necessary? What shall we say to the very question itself in dispute, about necessity and free-will? Does it not afford an evident and practical proof, that the will, in being impelled by motives, is absolutely free? It is not denied, that there is a certain connection between motive and action, between cause and effect. But does this take from us the liberty to act as we will, or as we please? What ingredients, indeed, may be imagined needful to constitute freedom of will, it is impossible for me to say, as the demands of refinement may be as outrageous, and as far beyond the ability of explanation and research, as the demands of the veriest ignorance and absurdity. But the power of actually concurring with, or setting aside the influence of any motive, by the assistance of some other, is certainly

* Freedom of Human Action explained.

tally a species at least of freedom in our volitions.

Nothing so palpable, then, as that man is a free agent, if we can either trust our simple conceptions of freedom, or, if what is opposite to necessity be freedom; and that matter, or whatever be dead and passive, is essentially necessary; and that mind, or whatever be living and active, is essentially free. This, at least, if not truly demonstrative, is yet sufficient to induce as hearty an assent, as right reason, I should think, could wish, or as can be expected to be derived from any deductions of so abstract a nature. Indeed, the opposite doctrine of philosophical necessity is, as I conceive, so repugnant to our feelings, and has so little support even from those subtilities which may be enlisted on the side of any opinion, that to find it openly espoused by men of sober thought and enlightened minds, would create astonishment, were it not, that we every day see what wonders of delusion may be wrought by the single charm of prejudice.

Necessity of action staggers the honest instincts of the vulgar, and even appals the intrepidity of the philosopher. Whereas the cheering
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ing suggestions of free-will conciliate the affections, find favour in the understanding, and have the testimony of their own principles confirmed by numberless auxiliary proofs. I do not here call in the Scriptures to my aid ; although we can scarcely open a page, in which man is not directly, or by implication, considered as a free agent. Were I to do so, I should be accused of arguing in a circle. But let it not be forgotten, “ That every man will be rendered unto according to his deeds.”* The predestinarian, consequently, abuses himself, when he conceives he is a being perfectly passive, pre-decreed to eternal happiness ; or utterly dead in sin, and incapable of working out his final salvation.

The doctrine of philosophical necessity, whatever may be said to the contrary, asserts, that through the influence of motives, which are not at our own disposal, and which, acting upon us, as necessarily as gravity acts upon matter, the Deity makes men be, and do, what he expressly designs and appoints ; that we are as instruments in his hands, to bring about certain events ; and that our whole freedom lies in the use of our limbs, and in nothing else ; and in being
exempt

* St. Paul.

exempt from the controul of others.* Thus, if we do nothing, and sit with folded arms, time works equally in our favour; and if we be industrious to gratify our most vicious propensities, our final account stands the same in the records of heaven. For if we be passive instruments of fate, how can we be justly accountable for our actions? That there should be merit in a man doing an act freely from a good motive, and demerit, in doing it freely from a bad motive, is so easy to conceive, that no rational mind was ever without the notion. But, that we should apply these terms to a necessary agent, seems as thoroughly absurd, as if we should attribute moral praise to the food that nourishes us, or moral blame, to the poison that would destroy us.†

With submission, therefore, to the necessitarians, who are the enlighteners of the present day, I must, as one of the uninformed multitude, adhere to the homely opinions of my fathers, and lay it down as a principle, that the present life is a state of probation and education, to prepare us for another. This is the only key I am acquainted with, which can open to me the designs of Providence in the economy

* Hobbes.

† Freedom of Human Action explained.

my of human affairs ; the only clue, which can guide me through that pathless wilderness ; and the only plan on which this world, as far as I am able to conceive, could possibly have been formed, or on which the history of man can be comprehended or explained.

Mortal existence, it is very clear, could never have been formed on a plan of happiness ; because it is every where overspread with innumerable miseries ; nor on a plan of misery, because it is every where interspersed with manifold enjoyments. It could not have been constituted for a scene of wisdom and virtue, because the history of mankind is little else than a detail of their follies and wickedness ; nor for a scene of vice, because vice is inconsistent in its nature, and is in reality destructive of every existence, and consequently of its own. But on a system of free agency, all that we meet with may be easily accounted for ; for this mixture of happiness and misery, of virtue and vice, necessarily results from a state of probation and education ; as probation implies trials, sufferings, and a capacity of offending ; and education supposes a chastisement for the commission of offences. *

Bolingbroke,

* Janyn's Int. Evid.

Bolingbroke, notwithstanding the unrestrained boldness of his assertions, very complacently indeed, acknowledges, there is such a thing as natural reason implanted in us by the author of our being; but, that reason itself would come too slowly to regulate the conduct of human life, if the all-wise Creator had not implanted in us another principle, that of *self-love*, which is the original spring of human actions, under the direction of instinct first, and of reason afterwards. Instinct and reason, says he, may be considered as distinct promulgations of the same law. Self-love directs necessarily to sociability: Instinct leads us to it by the sense of pleasure; and reason confirms us in it by a sense of happiness. Sociability is the foundation of human happiness. Society cannot be maintained without benevolence, justice, and other social virtues. Those virtues, therefore, are the foundation of society. And thus are we led from the instinctive to the rational law of nature. Self-love operates in all these stages. We love ourselves; we love our families; we love the particular societies to which we belong; and our benevolence extends at last to the whole race of mankind. Like so many different vortices, the centre of all is self-love; and

and that which is most distant from us is the weakest.*

It is undeniable, that from the selfish and original passions of human nature, the loss or gain even of a very small interest of our own, appears to be of vastly more importance, excites a much more passionate joy or sorrow, a much more ardent desire or aversion, than the greatest concern of another, with whom we have no particular connexion. The interests of a stranger, as long as they are surveyed from this station, can never be put in the balance with our own; can never restrain us from doing whatever may tend to promote our own immediate welfare, how ruinous soever be his condition. Before we can make any proper comparison of these opposite interests, we must change our respective positions. We must view them, neither from our own place, nor from that of the opposite party; neither with our own eyes, nor yet with his; but from the place, and with the eyes of a third person, who has no particular connection with either, and who judges with impartiality between both. Let us suppose, for instance, the great empire of China, with all its myriads of inhabitants, to be suddenly swallowed up by an earthquake,

* Bolingbroke.

quake; and let us consider how a man of humanity in Europe, who had no sort of connection with that part of the world, would be affected upon receiving intelligence of this dreadful calamity. He would, first of all, I will believe, express very strongly his sorrow for the misfortunes of that unhappy people; he would make many reflections upon the precariousness of human life, and the vanity of all the labours of man, which could thus be annihilated in a moment. But all this philosophy over, all these humane sentiments fairly expressed, what would he next do? He would pursue his business or his pleasure; take his repose or his diversion; and all this with the same ease and tranquillity, as if no such accident had happened.*

And happy for us it is so. But if our passive feelings be almost always so sordid and selfish, whence comes it, let me ask, that our active principles should often be so generous and noble? When we are always so much more deeply affected by whatever concerns ourselves than by whatever concerns other men, what is it, which prompts the generous upon all occasions, and the mean upon many, to sacrifice their own interests to the greater interests of others? It is not, surely, the softening power of humanity;

* Adam Smith.

humanity ; it is not that sentiment of benevolence, which nature has lighted up in the human heart, which is thus capable of counteracting the strongest impulses of self-love. No. It is a stronger power ; it is a more forcible motive, which exerts itself upon such occasions. It is reason, principle, conscience, the great judge and arbiter of our conduct, who, whenever we are about to act so as to affect the happiness of others, calls to us with a voice capable of humbling the most presumptuous of our passions ; that we are but one of the multitude, in no respect better than any other ; and that when we prefer ourselves so shamefully and so blindly to others, we do not what we ought to do. It is this which shows us the propriety of generosity, and the deformity of injustice ; the propriety of resigning the greatest interests of our own, for the yet greater interests of others ; and the deformity of doing the smallest injury to another, in order to obtain the greatest benefit to ourselves.*

This inmate of the breast, this abstract man, this representative of mankind, and substitute of the Deity, whom God has constituted the supreme and immediate judge of all our actions,

* Theory of Moral Sentiments.

tions, is not, I am afraid, so often attended to, as his authority demands. Compared with his decisions, if duly considered, the judgment of the world, though not altogether indifferent, would yet appear to be but of small moment. But we are seldom, if ever, quite candid with respect to ourselves. It is so very disagreeable to think ill of our own conduct, that we, in general, purposely turn our view from those circumstances, which might render that judgment unfavourable. Would not he be a bold surgeon whose hand would not tremble, when he performed an operation upon his own person? And would not he be equally as bold, who would not hesitate to pull off the mysterious veil of self-delusion, which would cover from his own immediate view the reprehensible parts of his own actions?

The laws of moral conduct are rarely left to the investigations of philosophy; they assume the hue and dispositions of the mind, whence they are derived. Writers of a sweet disposition, and warm imagination, thus hold, that man is a benevolent being, and that every man ought to direct his conduct for the good of all, regarding himself only as one of the number.* Those of a cold temperament, and of a phlegmatic mind,

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again,

* Lord Shaftesbury.

again, hold him to be an animal merely selfish ; and to evince this, examples are accumulated without number.* But neither of these systems, perhaps, is accurately that of nature. The selfish system, for example, is contradicted by the experience of all ages, affording the clearest evidence, that men frequently act for the sake of others, without regarding themselves, and sometimes in direct opposition to their own interest. And how much soever selfishness may prevail in action, it certainly does not always prevail in sentiment and affection. All men conspire to put a high estimation upon generosity, benevolence, and other social virtues ; whilst even the most selfish are disgusted with selfishness in others, and evermore endeavour to hide it in themselves.†

Man, in fact, is a complex being, composed of principles, some benevolent, and some selfish ; and these principles are so justly blended in his nature, as to fit him for acting a proper part in society. So deeply, however, do many moralists enter into some one particular passion or bias of human nature, says an elegant writer, that to use the painter's phrase, they quite overcharge the picture. " Thus," says he, " I have seen
a whole

* Helvetius.

† Lord Kaim:

a whole system of morals founded upon a single pillar of the inward frame ; and the entire conduct of life, and all the characters in it, accounted for, sometimes from superstition, sometimes from pride, and most commonly from interest. They forget, however, how various a creature it is they are painting ; how many springs and weights, nicely adjusted and balanced, enter into the movement, and require allowance to be made for their several clogs and impulses, ere they can define its operations and effects.*

* Enquiry on the Life and Writings of Homer.

LETTER XCIII.

IT would be well, perhaps, for man, were he not so often, and so peremptorily to pronounce on the inscrutable schemes of Providence. No mortal can look, without giddiness, into the vast abyss of eternal wisdom. Can the sight that is limited, perfectly comprehend an infinity of objects mutually related? We complain, when we should adore. Is not God good, because men are exposed to general evils, to tempests, to earthquakes; to famine, and to pestilence; as well as to particular evils, to pain, to sickness, and to death? Perfect happiness, indeed, cannot have been intended for a creature; for perfect happiness, being an attribute, would be as incommunicable as perfect power and eternity. Is God not good, because we are exposed to evils, which result necessarily from the constitution of a world, which, if we should allow it to have been made for man, must have been made for the universe also?

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But what real advantages, it is demanded, can result from wars, slaughtered millions, and a desolated earth? Can there be any optimist, capable of explaining the benefits that result from the evils of existence? To such questions I do not pretend to reply; for I do not presume to comprehend them. Of this, however, I am convinced, that we murmur and complain, when we should blush at our own presumption. The atheist, who would thus attack Providence, is miserably deficient in those real proofs, which can alone entitle him to affirm, what is adversity and what is not so. To many of these evils do we not expose ourselves voluntarily, and for no other reason, than to indulge the ruling passion of our own minds, to gratify, for example, our ambition, or our avarice? God has given us means to avoid, to palliate, or to cure these evils. But we sedulously court them. The evils, then, that may be said to come from God, are, for the most part, soon over; but the evils of ambition, of avarice, and of the other ruling passions, are everlasting. And the same persons, exposing themselves anew to the same inticements, are never to be satisfied. This world, then, says even a selfish philosopher, was made for the universe, and not exclusively for man. *

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* Bolingbroke.

It is undoubted, that however the rhetoric of Seneca may have dressed adversity with extrinsic ornaments, he has justly represented it, as affording some opportunities of observation, which cannot be found in continued success ; he has truly asserted, that to escape misfortune is to want instruction, and that to live at ease, is to live in ignorance. Distress, therefore, on some occasions, may be necessary to knowledge ; and is not such the delight of mental superiority, that none on whom nature, or study, have conferred it, would purchase the gifts of fortune by its loss ? The experience of counteraction, then, is necessary to a just sense of better fortune ; for the good of our present state is merely comparative ; and the evil which every man feels, will be sufficient to disturb and harrass him, if he do not know how much he escapes. That fortitude which has encountered no danger, that prudence which has surmounted no difficulties, that integrity which has been attacked by no temptations, can at best be considered but as gold not yet brought to the test, of which, therefore, the true value cannot be assigned.*

He who traverses the lists, consequently, says the philosopher, without an adversary, may receive

* Johnson.

ceive the reward of a victory, but he has no pretensions to the honour. If, then, it be the highest happiness of man to contemplate himself with satisfaction, and to receive the gratulations of his own conscience, he whose courage has withstood the turbulence of opposition, and whose vigour has broken through the snares of distress, has many advantages over those who have slept in the shades of indolence, and whose retrospect of time can entertain them with nothing but day rising upon day, and year gliding after year.

When we consider the condition of the great, indeed, in those delusive colours in which the imagination is apt to wander, theirs may seem to rise almost to the abstract idea of a perfect and happy state. It is the very state, which, in all our waking dreams, and idle reveries, we have sketched to ourselves, as the final object of our desires. But apart from the gaping multitude, there is a moment, when the most gorgeous man shrinks to his natural dimensions, and throws aside all ornaments and disguises, as in privacy they unflatteringly become useless incumbrances. Smiles and embroidery are alike occasional; and the mind is often dressed for show in painted honour, and fictitious felicity.

But to approach still nearer. Disease, it may be said, generally begins that equality, which death completes. The distinctions which set one man so much above another, are very little perceived, in the gloom of a sick chamber, where it will be vain to expect entertainment from the gay, or instruction from the wise ; and where all human glory is obliterated. The wit is clouded, the reasoner perplexed, and the hero subdued ; where the highest and brightest of mortal beings finds nothing left him, but the consciousness of innocence. * Descend into the vaults of death ; explore those dismal and melancholy chambers ; regard the pompous trappings, which adorn the resting places of the mighty ; by the pale light of their sepulchral lamp, admire the monuments of their grandeur ; or rather, in the serene tranquility of a philosophic mind, and in the profundity of silence, reflect on their annihilated glory, and on their majesty reduced to dust. " I have been," said the emperor Severus, " all that man could be ; but now, of what use to me all the foppery of honours ?" Then grasping the urn, which was to contain his ashes ; " Little urn," said he, " thou art now speedily to enclose, what all the world has been scarcely able to contain."

In

• Rambler.

In one great question, mankind, I will allow, are all deeply concerned ; and that is, whether we should exclusively endeavour to secure to ourselves the pleasures and gratifications of a life, which is uncertain and precarious, and at its utmost length of very inconsiderable duration ; or whether we ought to secure to ourselves the pleasures of a life, which we are taught to believe is fixed and settled, and never to have an end ? Every man, upon the first hearing of this question, knows well what his decision ought to be. But however right we may be in theory, it is plain we adhere in practice to the wrong side of the question. We make provision for this life, as though it were never to have an end ; and for the life to come, as though it were never to have a beginning.*

There certainly is no greater happiness (and in this all will agree) than to be able to look back on a life usefully and virtuously employed; and to trace our own progress in existence, by such tokens as excite neither shame nor sorrow. Ought it not, therefore, to be the care of those who wish, were it even for nothing more than to pass their last hours in comfort, to lay up such a treasure of pleasing reflections, as should support

* Addison.

port the expences of that time, which is to depend wholly upon the fund already acquired? "Honourable age," says a man of no mean abilities,* "is not that which standeth in length of time, or is measured by number of years. But wisdom is the grey hair to men, and an unspotted life is old age."

We conclude falsely, when we say, successful vice is happy. For who can calculate what guilt costs the dissolute man? When alone, and forced to reflect, is he not miserable in his impurities? Does he not tremble at the admonitions of solitude? From the externals of brilliancy and glare, it may, indeed, be conjectured, that contentment and satisfaction are invariably at his command. But nothing so true, as that the pleasure of guilt passes away, while the memory of it remains. *Peccare transit, peccasse manet.*† Disjoined by heaven, tranquility and guilt still stretch in vain their longing arms towards each other, nor dare to pass the insuperable bound. The pertinacious adhesion of unwelcome images, is the earthly hell of the abandoned. ‡

"Dubius

* Solomen. † St. Augustin. ‡ Johnson.

"Dubius vixi; incertus morior; quò vadam, nescio: ens entium, miserere mei!" I have lived in doubt, said a philosopher; I die in uncertainty; I know not whither I shall go; Being of Beings, have compassion upon me! One of the best springs of generous and worthy actions, it is evident, is the having generous and worthy thoughts of ourselves. Whoever has a mean opinion of the dignity of his nature, will act in no higher rank, than he has allotted himself in his own estimation. If he consider his being as circumscribed by the uncertain term of a few years, his designs will be contracted within the narrow span, which he imagines is to bound his existence. How can he exalt his thoughts to any thing really great and noble, who only believes that after a short turn on the stage of this world, he is to sink into oblivion, and to lose his consciousness for ever?

For this reason, there is not, as I have often repeated, so useful and elevated a contemplation as that of the soul's immortality. There is not a more improving exercise to the human mind, than to be frequently reviving its own great privileges and endowments; nor a more effectual means to awaken in us an ambition raised above low objects and little pursuits, than to
value

value ourselves as heirs of eternity. It is a great satisfaction to hear the best and wisest of mankind in all nations and ages asserting, as with one voice, this their birth-right, and to find it ratified by an express revelation. At the same time also, if we turn our thoughts inward upon ourselves, we shall meet with a secret sense, concurring with the proofs which have thus been supernaturally given us.

A good presumptive argument, likewise, arises from the increasing appetite of the mind after knowledge ; from the desire we feel of extending our faculties, which cannot be accomplished, as the more restrained faculties of lower creatures can, within the limits of a short life. Another probable conjecture, I think, is also to be raised from our appetite for existence itself, and from a reflection on our progress through the several stages of duration. We complain of the shortness of life, and yet are perpetually hurrying over the parts of it, to arrive at certain little settlements, or imaginary points of rest, which are dispersed up and down. Now what happens, when we arrive at these imaginary points of rest ? Do we stop our motion, and sit down satisfied in the settlement we have gained ; or are we not removing the boundary, and marking out new
points

points of rest, towards which we press forward with the like eagerness, and which cease to be such, as fast as we attain them? Our case is, indeed, very much like that of a traveller upon the Alps, who should fancy the top of the next hill must end his journey, because it terminates his prospect; but he no sooner arrives at it, than he sees new ground and other hills beyond it, and continues to travel on as before. *

Annihilation, then, I must firmly believe, is not to be the lot of those, who have the extraordinary inverted ambition of desiring it. But is it not beyond the power of credibility, almost, that men capable of thought, shall form to themselves the sullen satisfaction of thinking they shall sink into nothing? I will not say, that in all it amounts to a sordid hope, that they shall not be immortal, because they dare not endeavour to be so; but I will assert, that there are too many who, having degraded themselves below the character of immortality, are very willing to resign their pretensions to it; and to substitute in its room a dark negative happiness in the extinction of their being.

A drop

* Addison.

A drop of water, we are told by a Persian fable, fell out of a cloud into the sea, and finding itself lost in such an immensity of fluid matter, broke out into the following reflexion. Alas ! what an insignificant creature am I, in this prodigious ocean of waters ; my existence is of no concern to the universe, I am reduced to a kind of nothing, and am less than the least significant of the works of God. It so happened, that a shell fish, which lay in the neighbourhood of this drop, arrested it in the midst of this its humble soliloquy. The drop, says the fable, lay a great while hardening in the shell, till by degrees it was ripened into a pearl, which falling into the hand of a merchant, after a long series of adventures, is at present that famous pearl, which is fixed on the top of the Persian diadem.

The mind of man, on all occasions, adapts itself to the different nature of its objects ; it is contracted and debased by being conversant in little and low things ; and feels a proportionable enlargement, from the contemplation of great and sublime ideas. The greatness of things is thus merely comparative ; and this not only holds good in respect of extension, but even in

respect of dignity, duration, and all kinds of perfection. Astronomy, for instance, opens the mind, and alters our judgment, with regard to the magnitude of extended beings; but Christianity, as an higher pursuit, produces an universal greatness of soul. Philosophy contributes much towards the enlargement of our views; but Christianity extends them to a degree, beyond the general light of nature. Nor is this to be thought wholly to regard the understanding. For nothing in reality is of greater force to subdue the inordinate motions of the heart, and to regulate the will. For whether a man be actuated by his passions or his reason, these are first wrought upon by some object, which stirs the soul in proportion to its apparent dimensions. Hence irreligious men, whose short prospects are filled with earth, and sense, and mortal life, are invited by these unworthy ideas to actions proportionably little and low. Whereas a mind, whose views are enlightened and extended by religion, is animated to nobler pursuits, by more sublime and captivating prospects. *

Virtue is partly a habit, and partly a science. As to its principles, it is purely a science; as to its practice and progress, it is altogether a habit;
and

* Addison.

and that virtue cannot, in either respect, be perfect without religion, is admitted even by Shaftesbury himself. The religion of nature, therefore, as it is called, founds morality on temporal rewards and punishments. The religion of Christ, on the contrary, founds morality, not only on all the natural motives to rectitude, but also on the eternity of rewards and punishments. Christianity tends, consequently, more to the good of human society, than the mere impulses and dictates of reason.

But you will ask me, admitting all I have said to be true, where are the places of these rewards and punishments? In regard to heaven, you will say, we are in utter darkness. Even in regard to hell, the Scriptures themselves would teach us to believe, that by devils are meant, the idols or objects of idolatry, or injurious passions, and nothing else. Prior to the writing the Book of Chronicles, you will also contend, there is not the least mention of any angel being cast out of heaven, on account of his having sinned against God, as is the common opinion of such an apostate spirit; and therefore, that the author of the Book of Chronicles, by the word Satan, could not have intended such a being. Even the Hebrew word, rendered angels, you will like-

wise maintain to be often and justly translated messengers, and sometimes even prophets, the rulers and heads of the people, who from God delivered his messages to his chosen seed; and, therefore, that the word angels, by no means invariably denotes invisible spirits, much less fallen spirits. *

Let this be granted, and let the word *ταραχυν*, instead of implying *cast down to hell*, signify, as we are told it does, *to trouble*, or *move*, or *stir up*, and be properly applicable only to water; which, by a metaphor, may be rendered also troubled or perplexed. Let it also be admitted, that an allegorical interpretation is to be given of the whole narrative of our Saviour's being led up into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil; and after having fasted forty days and forty nights, being an hungred; of his being tempted by Satan, and Satan's saying, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread; of his being taken up upon a pinnacle or battlement of the temple, and the fallen spirit saying to him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence, for it is written, God shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall hold thee up, lest

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* Ashdowne's Enquiry.

at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone ; of his being taken up upon an exceeding high mountain, and the devil's shewing him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them ; and saying, All these things will I give thee, and the glory of them, if thou wilt fall down and worship me ; for they are delivered unto me, and to whomsoever I will I give them.

All this, for argument sake, I grant you, and even more, if you are so inclined. But recollect that Christ, as well as Moses, spoke frequently in figure and parable. I have more than once, indeed, had occasion to dwell on this ancient written and verbal style of communication. Moses, you will remember, for instance, was well acquainted with that principle of the philosophers of his days, which said, Important things are strengthened by reserve, but weakened by general acquaintance. Hence, consequently, his allegories. Christ, also, revealed the mysteries of his mission to his disciples, and to them in privacy. To the people he, for the most part, spoke figuratively. The statue of Harpocrates, among the Egyptians, was always represented with his finger on his lips, to denote silence. The priests of Egypt, the Magi of Persia, the Cabbalists of the Hebrews, the Brahmins of India, the Druids of the

the Scythians, the Mythologists and Poets, the Orpheuses, Hesiods, Homers, Pythagorases, Platos, Porphyrys, &c. all delivered themselves in the same enigmatic and mystical manner. Christ thus also, often to the Jews, personifies sin, calling it their master, and they his servants or slaves. He tells them, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do; he was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him." Now can I suppose it to be unjustifiably straining the sense of the word devil, to imagine that by that word, Christ personified sin, whom the Jews had made their father, by doing his deeds? Or can any man seriously believe, the Jews had seen the deeds of the devil as a murderer and a liar?* One expression of St. Paul, however, unequivocally illustrates and explains this sort of interpretation. "Wherefore we would have come unto you (even I, Paul) once and again, but Satan hindered us." Again he says, "When I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means, the tempter, having tempted you, our labour be in vain." The Apostle James, likewise, says, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you." Even though it

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should

* Ashdowne's Enquiry.

should be demanded, how we are to account for what Jesus, the Evangelists, and the Apostles have said of Satan, as being then existing, if there really was no such being? May it not be replied, that if there be any force in the objection, it equally applies to what they have said of dæmons, which, in a like manner, supposes, not only their existence, but also their having power to possess the bodies of men, and produce disorders in them, such as are related in the New Testament?

On all such questions, I neither give a negative, nor an affirmative decision; nor is it, in my apprehension, of the smallest consequence as to the great point of future rewards and punishments. To fix on the locality of heaven is no more within our power, than it is for us to penetrate into the essences of our own nature. One thing, however, we may be sure of, that as God is bounteous and merciful, whatever, and wherever heaven may be placed, it will be as open to one child of humanity as to another; to the virtuous Heathen, as to the virtuous Christian; to the poor wretch, who unenlightened wanders in the frozen region, as to the proud sectarist, who excludes all others, besides those of his own immediate

mediate persuasion, from the throne of mercy, and from the uninfluenced benevolence of our common Father.

“Common sense,” says Bolingbroke, “requires, that every thing, proposed to the understanding, should be accompanied with such proof as the nature of it can furnish. He who requires more, is guilty of absurdity; he who requires less, of rashness. And nothing, therefore, should seem in speculation so proper to inforce moral obligation, as a true revelation, or a revelation believed to be true. The same writer affirms, that the greater part of the philosophers of antiquity did their utmost to establish the belief of rewards and punishments in a future life, that they might the more effectually allure to virtue, and deter from vice. Yet strange to say, he afterwards tells us, and as it were exulting in the contradiction, that the most zealous assertors of a Supreme Being, and warmest defenders of his providence, and they who were the most persuaded of the necessity of religion to preserve government, either rejected the doctrine of a future state, or admitted it only by halves; that is, not admitting it as relative to punishments.

The truth is, it would be equally erroneous to say, that all the philosophers of antiquity believed it, as that none of them believed it. We have had an abundance of examples on this head already. You will not, however, have forgotten, that Plato (and there is no necessity to recur to other names) insinuates in many places the want and the necessity of a divine revelation to discover the service which God requires, and the expiation for sin, and to give men stronger assurances of the rewards and punishments, that await them in another world. Neither will it have escaped you, that Lord Bolingbroke himself, in various passages in his works, owns that men's iniquities are such, as to render natural or revealed religion, and all the means that tend to the reformation of mankind, highly necessary. And that nothing should be neglected, which tends to enforce moral obligation, and all the doctrines of natural religion.

The vicissitudes of human grandeur, the translations and revolutions of states and empires, the perpetual fluctuations of powers and dignities, are phænomena that caught the earliest observation of mankind. Experience of what passed immediately under their own eyes, in a life moderately extended, without regarding general history,

history, which is nothing but a ceaseless round of advancement and abasement, was sufficient to persuade them of some extraordinary affection in the universe, that seemed to oppose stability and human prudence. These apprehensions, favouring a natural disposition to the wonderful, soon grew up into an established opinion, that all this confusion was caused by a certain deity, who envied the prosperity of mankind, who in petulance, scattered empires, overturned thrones, and hurled crowns and sceptres from one side of the globe to the other ; while constancy, duration, and a pure unmixed felicity, were the objects of his fixed resentment. To this deity they gave the several names of Nemesis, Fortune, the evil genius, or dæmon. Herodotus ventures to insinuate, that all the gods were of an envious nature. Plutarch avows the belief of an envious dæmon. Even the atheist Lucretius, whose cold philosophy had formally excluded all superintendency of mind, struck with the perpetually shifting prospect, betrays his cause, and breaks out into this unexpected confession,

*Usque adeo res humanas vis abdita quædam
Obterit, & pulchros Fasceis sævasque securis.**

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* Lib. v.

The transition from a bad deity, to a merciless and unrelenting one, was very natural ; especially with men who assumed the privilege of calling the administration of Providence to account on every ordinary occasion, either in the moral, or in the natural disposition of the world. In the age of Sallust, the demoniac hypothesis was generally received and acknowledged. Virtue, says he, in public as in private concerns ought to be omnipotent. But is not vice the evil genius, or *dæmon*, that throws the world into confusion ? It would be loss of time, however, were I to detain you with all the instances, which are to be quoted on this subject of the supernatural interference of evil *dæmons*. Almost every writer of antiquity might be brought forward upon this occasion ; but let it content us to know, that so deeply rooted an opinion, and one so monstrous and injurious to God, soon lost its credit, on the subversion of the Pagan creed, by the introduction of Christianity. *

The operation of fear is more wonderful, I will confess, than at first is generally imagined. It has even been more often recommended as a topical and radical remedy, than any other affection. Hence its authoritative influence at all times

* Warburton.

times in systems of craft and superstition. Thus we read, even in much grosser instances, its application has been extraordinarily efficacious. As for example, before the use of bark, it was successfully employed, we are told, in the cure of intermittent fevers, by means of those devices, which are most likely to excite it; as by hanging toads round the neck, or exposing the patient to other objects of dread, which, though perhaps harmless in themselves, were deemed highly pernicious. The celebrated Boerhaave, after all other trials had failed, cured a sympathetic epilepsy, which a whole ward, almost, of orphan children, had caught from one who was really diseased, by assembling all the children in a room where burning cauldrons, with a number of cauterizing irons, had been placed. There addressing them with much solemnity, he at length concluded, and with infinite gravity pronounced the remedy for the complaint to be a red hot iron; and directed that such should be immediately applied, even to the burning to the bone, to the first patient who should be seized with a fit. The proceeding had its effect. The disease was immediately checked, and its further progress consequently prevented. In cases of insanity, also, (and I desire you will not laugh at my pathological comparisons) this passion is obviously

obviously useful, as by its influence the most furious maniacs are quieted. In *mania*, therefore, fear is always to be employed with safety, and often with at least temporary advantage. In regard to other diseases, indeed, I have not medical learning enough to say, whether extreme apprehension, or terror, can be employed with advantage. But these instances are sufficient, for the analogical application I mean to make of them to our present subject.

In a French book, entitled *Kalendrier des Bergers*, we have the punishment of the seven deadly sins, imagined with considerable strength of fancy ; and in such manner as I think must have insured it some sort of efficacy in its day. The proud are bound by hooks of iron to vast wheels, like mills, placed between craggy precipices, which are incessantly whirling with the most violent impetuosity, and sound like thunder. The envious are plunged into a lake half frozen, from which, as they attempt to emerge for ease, their naked limbs are instantly smote with a blast of such intolerable keenness, that they are compelled to dive again into the lake. To the wrathful is assigned a gloomy cavern, in which their bodies are butchered, and their limbs mangled by dæmons, with various weapons.

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The slothful are tormented in a "horrible hall, dark and tenebrous," swarming with innumerable flying serpents of various shapes and sizes, which sting to the heart. The covetous are dipped in cauldrons filled with boiling metals. The gluttonous are placed in a vale, near a loathsome pool, abounding with venomous creatures; on whose banks tables are spread, from which they are perpetually crammed with toads, by devils. And concupiscence is punished in a field full of immense pits, or wells, overflowing with fire and sulphur.

Tartarus, you know, was one of the regions of hell, where, according to the ancients, the most impious and guilty among mankind were punished. It was surrounded with a brazen wall, and its entrance was continually hidden from the sight by a cloud of darkness, which is represented as three times more gloomy than the obscurest night. According to Hesiod, it was a separate prison, at a greater distance from the earth, than the earth is from the heavens. Virgil says, it was surrounded by three impenetrable walls, and by the impetuous and burning streams of the river Phlegethon. The entrance is by a large and lofty tower, says he, whose gates are supported by columns of adamant, which neither

ther gods nor man can open. In Tartarus were punished, such as had been disobedient to their parents, traitors, adulterers, faithless ministers, and such as had undertaken unjust and cruel wars, or had betrayed their friends for the sake of money. It was also the place where Ixion, Tityus, the Danaides, Tantalus, Sisyphus, &c. were punished for their respective offences.

Nox, you will likewise recollect, was one of the most ancient deities among the heathens, and daughter of Chaos. From her union with her brother Erebus, she gave birth to the day and the light. She was also the mother of the *Parcæ*, *Hesperides*, and dreams; of *Momus*, fraud, discord, and death. The constellations went before her, as her constant messengers. The *Parcæ*, her daughters, were the most powerful of goddesses, for they presided over the birth and the life of mankind. *Clotho*, the youngest of the sisters, presides over the moment of birth, and holds a distaff in her hand. *Lachesis* spins out all the events and actions of our lives, and holds a spindle in her hand; and *Atropos* the inflexible, and inexorable, and the eldest of the three, cuts the thread of life with her disastrous scissars. These *Parcæ* were generally represented as three old women, with chaplets made of wool,
interwoven

interwoven with the flowers of the Narcissus. They were covered with a white robe, and fillet of the same colour, and bound with chaplets.

But not to dwell longer on these mythological and poetical conceits, I shall finish this letter in the expressive words of two moralists, whose labours have enlightened, and whose abilities have been an ornament to our nation. "One of the brightest hopes of a future state," says Doctor Johnson, "is, that we shall meet again those whom we have loved upon earth. Call not this an illusion. Of this, I am certain, that whether it be an illusion or not, a faith in it ought to be cherished, for the comfort it brings to the heart; and revered for the dignity it imparts to the mind. Such a feeling makes a happy and an important part of our belief in a future existence. It gives energy to virtue, and stability to principle."

"The privilege of a thinking being" says Addison, "is to withdraw from the objects that solicit his senses, and to turn his thoughts inward on himself. For my own part," says he, "I often mitigate the pain arising from the little misfortunes and disappointments that chequer human life, by this introversion of my faculties, wherein

wherein I regard my own soul, as the image of her Creator, and receive great consolation from beholding those perfections, which testify her divine original, and lead me into some knowledge of her everlasting archetype. But there is not any property or circumstance of my being, that I contemplate with more joy, than my immortality. I can presently overlook any momentary sorrow, when I reflect it is in my power to be happy during an eternity. If it were not for this thought, I had rather be a brute than a man ; the most stupid and senseless of animals, than a reasonable mind, tortured with an extreme innate desire of that perfection, which it despairs to obtain. And it is with infinite pleasure I behold instinct, reason, and faith, all concurring to attest this comfortable truth. It is revealed from heaven ; it is discovered by philosophers ; and the ignorant and uninformed part of mankind have a natural propensity to believe it."

LET-

LETTER XCIV.

PAGANISM, we are told, was rapidly wearing out in theory, if not in practice, when Christianity appeared. Its impostures were detected ; its absurd doctrines and rites were exposed to ridicule. The priests could not defend it ; and philosophers explained it away. It, in short, lay exposed, like an unfortified country, and open to every incursion. On the contrary, Christianity was fresh and vigorous : and by being declared to be the religion of mankind, in contradistinction to the code of the Jews, as well as being composed of more sublime and humane doctrines, it was rapidly embraced. And no sooner had it taken possession of the court and the cities, than heathenism became so generally the religion of peasants only, that the appellation of *Paganism* most probably took its rise from that circumstance.*

This

* Bolingbroke.

This is such a concession on the part of Bolingbroke, and of such an age as the Augustan, that he would not have made it, could it in any manner have been avoided: it was irresistibly forced upon him by truth. But was it likely that so many beams of light should have issued from the chambers of heaven, for no other purpose than to lead man into error? The parent of modern deism, the formidable Lord Herbert, of Cherbury, himself, confesses that the knowledge which the Gentiles had of the one supreme God, was lame and imperfect; and thence, says he, it came to pass, that the rays of the divine perfections being intercepted, a wonderful darkness overspread the minds of the vulgar. He also observes, that from what was added by priests, poets, and philosophers, the whole fabric of truth was in danger of falling to the ground. “*Tota inclinata, in casumque prona, mutavit veritatis fabrica.*”*

A plain man, on inquiring into the principles of his religion, may not perhaps at once be able to say what pure Christianity is, divested of its ornaments, appendages, and corruption; but, what it is not, I think he will boldly venture to affirm; which is, that it is not the offspring of fraud

* *De Veritate.*

fraud or fiction. Such, indeed, on a superficial view, he knows it may have appeared to men even of good understandings, whose lot it unfortunately had been to take in too circumscribed a field of observation, or to have been employed on matters of more immediate worldly concern. But a closer inspection, an examination with accuracy and candour, he knows must dispel the illusion, or at least satisfactorily evince, that, however fraud and fiction may have grown up with it, it never could have been grafted on the same stock, nor have been planted by the same hand.* Arrogance, and the high tone of authority, assumed by mortals like himself, will indeed provoke his indignation. But on further reflection he will perceive, that, however altered from its primitive simplicity, the religion of Christ is not a mass of presumption, which would oppose itself to right reason; but on the contrary, that the firm and rational belief of God, even on philosophical grounds, lies at the foundation of Christianity.

The undertaking of Christ was a glorious and a mighty one. It was the reforming, and the enlightening the world. And here, permit me again to demand, what were the instruments he

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* Soame Jenyns.

put into action, for the success of this great and momentous enterprize? Or what were the rewards which he gave in expectation? In the first place, his ministers were indigent, humble men, *ἀγροῖμμοι καὶ ἰδιῶται*, and daily forced to labour for the means even of daily subsistence. Of men of such low estate he made choice, for the spreading abroad his doctrines. In regard to their rewards, he assured them of none in this life; on the contrary, the only remuneration for the agonizing sufferings they were to undergo, was, as he expressly declared to them, joy and happiness in another state of existence. Was this an usual or an alluring way of commencing reformation? That which is invisible, is to him, who has no hopes of a futurity, both imaginary and ridiculous. Nor are ignorant men, in general, to be tempted to surrender themselves cheerfully to misery and torment, on the bare promise of blessings to be heaped on them, when as men, they shall be no longer capable of enjoying them! On what, then, was he to depend for success, while acting in every respect repugnant to the received opinions of the refined, as well as to the instinctive movements of the uncultivated understanding, but on the soundness and truth of his doctrine?

Christ's commission, you will tell me, while he was living and acting in the flesh, extended only to the Jewish nation, and that beyond this he was not to exercise his ministry, either by himself or his disciples. Thus, when he chose the twelve, and the seventy, and sent them out to preach among the Jews, it was with a particular injunction, not to go among the Gentiles or proselytes of the gate, nor to enter into any of the cities of the Samaritans; but to preach repentance, for the remission of sins, in his name, to the Jews only, and to declare, that "he was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel:" and accordingly, that the ministry of Christ and the Apostles was confined entirely to the three provinces of Palestine, Judea, Samaria, and Galilee, where the Jerusalem Hebrew was understood.

You do not, however, certainly mean by this to insinuate that Christ's design extended no further than to the Jewish nation. While he lived, he himself undoubtedly never opened his commission further. But his general and repeated expressions take in the whole circle of the human race. The phrenzy of his bitterest enemies, indeed, never ventured to accuse him of blasphemously circumscribing the favour of

Almighty God. Sectaries, I know, who have disgraced his system, have sometimes impiously drawn a line of demarcation. Nay, it hath not been unusual for them to divide the earth into two parts; to give eternal damnation to the one moiety, and oracular omnipotency, vicegerent heavenly authority, and fulminating right, and the power of proscription, to the other. But this was never in the contemplation of our Saviour.

Christ died for mankind indiscriminately. Why then, you will ask, was not Christianity indiscriminately given to all? I answer the question by a counter question. Why has Providence permitted the knowledge of arts and sciences to illuminate Europe in so distinguished a manner, while Africans are, in a great measure, as barbarous and uncivilized, as the quadrupeds that range through the woods? Why are the poor wretches in Hudson's Bay afforded scarcely the necessaries of life; while in England, France, Germany, and the other happy parts of the globe, the more fortunate inhabitants have had dealt to them with a liberal hand, not only all the necessaries, but all the comforts and elegancies of life? These questions you can no more answer, than I can yours. And, therefore, it is idle, though it may perhaps be stiled ingenious, to
argue,

argue, that if it had pleased God to ordain, that the knowledge of Christ should be universal, he would not have wrapt up his coming in obscure enigmatical veils, like the responses of the Pythia, for men to guess at, but would have set them down in words at full length, and not in mystical figures; that he would have plainly told mankind, in such and such a year of Augustus's reign, or of Herod's administration, Christ would be born; that such a perfidious wretch as Judas would betray him; that the Sanhedrim of the Jews would plot his death; and that God would, after so many years, punish that people for their unjust and cruel treatment of him, by the final destruction of their city,

I need not remind you here, that the gospel teaches, that the forgiveness of sins extends to those who lived long before our Lord on earth, and who never heard of his name. No conclusion, then, unfavourable to Christianity, can be drawn from the circumstance of its being known in some parts only, and not known till four thousand years after the creation. For if it had been known one thousand, or three thousand years sooner, a captious mind might still ask, why was it not earlier, and co-eval with man-

kind? Whatever concerns man must have a beginning; and that Being who governs the universe, and who sees at once the present, the past, and the future, can alone determine, *when* any particular dispensation of Providence ought to begin, how quick, or how slow it ought to be in its progress, and when it should be completed. Is it correct in argument, to suppose the recency of a discovery, to be absolutely against its utility? On such grounds, many of the most beneficial discoveries even of man, within modern times, would be totally condemned. *

The capacity of the human mind, as it relates to the superintendency of God, is more feeble, you may believe me, than that of infants, in regard to the comprehension of mathematics. But give me leave to ask, if even such, or somewhat similar modes of reasoning, be not in some respects very striking confirmations of the very truth of the Christian system? A writer of great mental energy,† and one openly adverse to Christianity, is yet even found thus to express himself: He first speaks of man's natural weakness and inability; and represents those as vain of themselves, who, in the present state of
mankind

* Beattie.

† Dr. Morgan.

mankind, talk of the strength of human reason in matters of religion. At the time of Christ's appearing then, says he, mankind in general were in a state of gross ignorance and darkness, with respect to the true knowledge of God, and of themselves, and of all those moral relations and obligations we stand in to the Supreme Being, and to one another. All were under a great uncertainty concerning a future state, and the concern of divine Providence in the government of the world; and at the same time, were filled with a proud and empty conceit of their own moral abilities and self sufficiency. Christ's doctrines on these heads, however, certainly, though they appeared to be the true and genuine principles of nature and reason, when he had set them in a proper light, yet were such as the people had never heard or thought of before, and never would have known, without such an instructor, and one possessed of such means, and such opportunities of knowledge. They, therefore, who would judge rightly of the strength of human reason, in matters of morality and religion, under the present corrupt and degenerate state of mankind, ought consequently to take their estimate from those parts of the world, which never had the benefit of revelation, and this, perhaps, might make them less arrogant of themselves,

and more thankful to God, for the light of the gospel.*

This same writer, in another place, asks, if the religion of nature, under the present pravity and corruption of mankind, were written with sufficient strength and clearness upon every man's heart; why might not a Chinese, or an Indian, draw up as good a system of natural religion as a Christian; and why have we never met with any such? On the contrary he remarks, let us take Confucius, Zoroaster, Plato, Socrates, or the greatest moralist that ever lived without the light of revelation, and it will appear that their best systems of morality were intermixed and blended with so much superstition, and so many gross absurdities, as quite to elude and defeat their main design.

Fas est et ab hoste doceri. Nothing is more decidedly clear, than that it is impossible those men should have any just idea of the perfection of God, who think the dictates of infinite wisdom do not carry their own evidence with them, or are not by their own innate worth discoverable to all mankind. Were it not so, how could such be distinguished from the uncertain opinions of
weak

* Moral Philosopher.

weak and fallible individuals; not to say the whimsies and reveries of visionary enthusiasts? It consequently is not wise, within the pale of Christianity, to declare, that "Certain things, if they are not to be adored as mysteries, ought to be exploded as absurdities." Nor should it be too much insisted upon, that religion ought to be received on the score of authority; for this would imply, that if the same authority promulgated a different religion, we should, on the same authority, be obliged to receive it; and indeed, it is an odd method of proving the truth of a book, by the truth of the doctrine it contains; and at the same time to conclude those doctrines to be true, because contained in that book. And yet this is a method every man pursues, who contends that others, as well as himself, should be absolutely governed by authority as well as by reason.

Some scrupulously orthodox men say, they see no cause to believe, that God takes equal delight in the various kinds of worship, which have been established in the world; and that a specific difference in religion is in itself, and abstractedly considered, as acceptable to him, as that diversity of beings which he has made; especially as he has plainly discovered one most perfect

perfect standard. * It is but reasonable, however, to suppose, that it is one and the same Being whom all mankind adore. We behold the same stars ; we live under the influence of one common heaven ; we are encompassed by the same universe. Each unenlightened man, therefore, follows his own plan in the search of truth. It clearly, then, was the will of the Governor of the earth, that the Syrians should worship one way ; the Greeks another ; and the Egyptians another. Had he meant otherwise, he would have so ordained it ; and men would of necessity have followed what he had prescribed to them. †

If we suppose a large family of children, who on any particular day, or particular circumstance, made it a constant custom to present to their parents some token of their affection and gratitude ; each of them would, no doubt, make a different offering, and most probably in a different manner. Some would pay their congratulations in themes of verse or prose ; some by little devices, as their genius dictated, or according to what they thought would please ; and, perhaps, the least of all, not able to do any of those things, would ramble into the garden, or the

* Bishop Law. † Divine Legation of Moses.

the field, and gather what it thought the prettiest flower it could find, though, perhaps, it might be but a simple weed. Nor would the parent, perhaps, be less gratified by such variety, than if the whole had acted on a concerted plan, and each had made exactly the same offering. This would have the cold appearance of contrivance, or the harsh one of controul. But of all unwelcome things, nothing surely could more afflict the parent, than to know, that the whole of them had afterwards gotten together by the ears, boys and girls, fighting, scratching, reviling, and abusing each other, to determine which was the best present. *

The heavens and their great Creator are at first hid in clouds, to unenlightened man. Hence the rude emblem. Then comes the adoration of the sun, and the astral glory. Thence follow the symbolical representations of the elements and the phænomena of nature. Artists of ability at length start up. From them issue an Apollo, a Venus, a Jupiter. These at first draw admiration: they finally fix reverence; and idolatry becomes established. The great and the learned affix one idea to the gods; the multitude affix another; and, agreeably to their
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rude sentiments of morality, decks them in virtue or in vice, as best suits the occasion. The poet appears last of all, and sanctifies the mythological cheat by the harmony of number, and the sweetness of sound. The result is to be read in the history of nations. The manners of the people are to be found in the attributes of their divinities.

There are no people, indeed, who do not, by the light of nature, and an internal sense of their own weakness, agree in submission to a superior being; though they all, perhaps, disagree in the ideas they have formed to themselves of him. Every thing, of which the senses can judge, or which the imagination can form, whatever is most brilliant, and beyond our reach, as well as whatever is most vile, terrific, and noxious, hath been deified by some people or other. Each has had its incense, its altars, and its victims. In one place there have been visible gods, represented by bronzes and marbles; in another, it has been a crime to represent the object of worship. Here have flowed the blood of animals and men; there incense only has smoked. In this spot, the angry gods have been appeased by public games and spectacles; in that, by rigorous penance, and voluntary sufferings.

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He who honours the divinity of that country, abominates the divinity of this. The most imposing pageantry of the hierarchy, is but sacrilege to the Mahomedan. There is, however, all this time, but one God. And O ! divine truth, whenever it shall please the Father of mercies to let his light shine universally among men, the darkness, which now covers so much of the earth, will be dispersed ; and the innumerable nations, who still remain in blindness, will have that path rendered clear to them, which undeviatingly conducts to terrestrial tranquility, and to immortal happiness !

The first publishers of Christianity preached the religion of Jesus, not merely in small villages, or obscure parts of the country, but in populous cities, in those parts of the world, that were most celebrated for the liberal arts, learning, and politeness. They published that religion, and the wonderful facts by which it was supported, throughout the Lesser Asia, Greece, and Italy ; in the cities of Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, Thessalonica, Philippi, Athens, and Rome itself. But is it a worthy conduct in latitudinarians, particularly in Hume, does it even square with the principles of his own creed, in speaking of Christianity, to alledge that, “ in the

the infancy of new religions, the wise and learned commonly esteem the matter too inconsiderable to deserve their attention and regard ; and when afterwards they would willingly detect the cheat, in order to undeceive the deluded multitude, the season is gone, and the records and witnesses, who might clear up the matter, are perished beyond recovery !”*

I will not trespass upon your time by a formal reply to this indecent aspersion ; or by enumerating instances of the wise and learned, the business of whose lives was to search after truth, to sift the several opinions of philosophers concerning the duty, the end, and chief happiness of reasonable creatures, and who were among the earliest converts to Christianity. Three of them only I will mention, who were members of senates, famous for their wisdom and knowledge. Joseph the Arimathean, was of the Jewish Sanhedrim ; Dionysius was of the Athenian Areopagus ; and Flavius Clemens was of the Roman senate ; nay, at the time of his death, consul at Rome. These three were so thoroughly satisfied of the truth of the Christian religion, that the first of them, according to all the reports of antiquity, died a martyr for it ; as did the second

cond, unless we disbelieve Aristides, his fellow-citizen and contemporary ; and also the third, as we are informed, both by Roman and Christian authors.

Tertullian tells the Roman governors, that their corporations, councils, armies, tribes, companies, the palace, senate, and courts of judicature, were filled with Christians. And Arnobius asserts, that men of the finest parts and learning, orators, grammarians, rhetoricians, lawyers, philosophers, physicians, despising the sentiments they had been once fond of, took up their rest in the Christian religion. Nor was it likely it should have happened otherwise, when honest and learned heathens saw multitudes of virtuous men, daily forming themselves upon the example of their Saviour, animated by his precepts, and actuated by that spirit, which he had promised to send amongst his disciples.*

“ You are eloquent,” says the respectable Bishop Watson to Mr. Gibbon, “ in describing the austere morality of the primitive Christians, as adverse to the propensities of sense, and abhorrent from all the innocent pleasures and amusements

* Addison.

amusements of life ; and you enlarge, with a studied minuteness, upon their censures of luxury, and their sentiments concerning marriage and chastity : but in this circumstantial enumeration of their errors or their faults (which I am under no necessity of denying or excusing) you seem to forget the very purpose for which you profess to have introduced the mention of them ; for the picture you have drawn is so hideous, and the colouring so dismal, that instead of alluring to a closer inspection, it must have made every man of pleasure, or of sense, turn from it with horror or disgust ; and so far from contributing to the rapid growth of Christianity, by the austerity of its manners, it must be a wonder to any one, how the first Christians even made a single convert.—It was first objected by Celsus, that Christianity was a mean religion, inculcating such a pusillanimity and patience under affronts, such a contempt of riches, and worldly honours, as must weaken the nerves of civil government, and expose a society of Christians a prey to the first invaders. This objection has been repeated by Bayle ; and though fully answered by Bernard and others, it is still the favourite theme of every *esprit fort* of our own age : even you, Sir, continues the Bishop, think the aversion of Christians to the business of war and government, a criminal
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disregard to the public welfare." To all that has been said upon this subject, it may with justice, I think, be answered, that Christianity troubles not itself with ordering the constitutions of civil societies, but levels the weight of all its influence at the hearts of the individuals which compose them; and as Origen said to Celsus, were every individual in every nation a gospel Christian, there would be neither internal injustice, nor external war; there would be none of those passions which embitter the intercourses of civil life, and desolate the globe. What reproach then can it be to a religion, that it inculcates doctrines, which, if universally practised, would introduce universal tranquility, and the most exalted happiness among mankind?*

But there is a very material point, exclaim the enemies of Christianity, which has never yet been satisfactorily cleared up, respecting the sufferings and death of Christ: he himself seems to have had no notion of the necessity of his death, as a propitiation and atonement for the sins of the world; and an indispensable condition for the salvation of mankind. He prayed fervently and earnestly, not to be put to any such trial; and that, if possible, such a cup of

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sorrow.

* Letters to Gibbon.

sorrow might pass from him. Now, is any man to imagine, that Christ would have spent a whole night in such earnest prayers and supplications to God, even in tears and in bloody sweats, in order to prevent a thing which he certainly knew must happen; and which had previously been agreed upon between the Father and him? Would the common Saviour and friend of mankind have thus declined a few hours bodily pain, in a way that many thousands had suffered before him, had he thought it necessary, to destroy the power of the devil, or to open the gates of heaven to a whole world of lost, undone creatures? In short, continue they, there is an eternal contradiction to the nature and reason of things, in the doctrine that Christ was punished for our sins, or that we are rewarded for his righteousness.*

A still more rash author ventures to pronounce that the mystery of our redemption by the blood of Christ, makes the love displayed in it, partiality, and the justice shewed in it, injustice: and that injustice and cruelty were moreover united, inasmuch as that mankind would not have been redeemed, if the Jews had not crucified Christ; and yet that the Jews were re-
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* Dr. Morgan.

jected and punished for crucifying him.* I have already, however, declared my insufficiency for unravelling the mysterious ways of the will of Providence. In what method it might have pleased God to deal with his creatures, and to dispense his acts of grace and favour towards them, I cannot take upon me to determine. Until it shall be revealed, it must lie hidden. But Christ was surely wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities. He was; and no one can deny it, despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrow, and acquainted with grief.

The sufferings and death of Christ, we have consequently reason to believe, to have been a propitiatory sacrifice for sin; the moral and effective means for the salvation and recovery of man: not perhaps as justifying us altogether in itself, but as directing us to, and putting us in the way and method of our justification and acceptance with God. And thus we may probably be right in supposing, that we are justified and saved by and through Christ, who, by his righteousness and obedience unto death, hath obtained favour of God to set up a kingdom of peace and righteousness in the world; and hence,

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* Bolingbroke.

by a warrantable metaphor, that he is our Propitiator and Redeemer.

But although it be thus contended, that Christ, who is held up as the greatest example of patience, did not die for the sins of men; or even if he did, that he did not bear his sufferings and death with any tolerable courage, even with the composure of heathen resolution; may we not answer with Origen? "Christ's silence under the whips and torments, shewed greater courage and patience, than the most eloquent Greek or Roman could have shewn, by speaking in such circumstances." To this may be added, what eclipses the glory of all former sufferers, that under his sufferings he prayed for his enemies; "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Magnanimity, in great distress, always appears with a divinity about it. But the weakness of sorrow only appears sublime, when it arises from what we feel for others, more than from what we feel for ourselves. This Son of God, then, who was given to be the ruler of men, for "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called wonderful, counsellor, the

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the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace ;”* when he saw the night was arrived, wherein he was to be delivered into the hands of his enemies, like a dying father in the midst of his family, mingling consolation to his disciples with his last instructions, “ He lift up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father ! the hour is come.” † Then finishing with that solemn prayer of intercession for the church, which closed his ministry, he immediately went forth with his disciples into the garden of Gethsemane, and surrendered himself to those who came to apprehend him. This was the hour of distress, and of blood. When subsequently led forth to suffer, the first voice we hear from him, is a generous lamentation over the fate of his unfortunate, though guilty country ; and to the last moment of his life, we behold him in possession of the same gentle and benevolent spirit. No upbraiding, no complaining expression escaped from his lips, during the long and painful approaches of a cruel death. He betrayed no symptom of a weak or vulgar, of a discomposed or impatient mind. With the utmost attention of filial tenderness, he committed his aged mother to the care of his beloved disciple. With complacent dignity, he conferred pardon on a penitent fel-

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* Isaiah.

† John.

low-sufferer: and with a greatness of mind beyond example, he spent his last moments in apologies and prayers for those who were shedding his blood. At length the awful moment arrived; he said, "I thirst," and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it to his mouth. After he had tasted the vinegar, knowing that all things were now accomplished, and the Scripture fulfilled, he said, "it is finished;" that is, this offered draught of vinegar was the *last* circumstance predicted by an ancient prophet, that remained to be fulfilled.* The vision and the prophecy are now sealed: the Mosiac dispensation is closed. "And he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost."†

The interpretation of the vicarious atonement of our Saviour, I shall here, however, wave the particular discussion of, as it stands, in my apprehension, upon similar grounds with miracles, the consideration of which we have not found materially necessary to the prosecution of our enquiries. The publication and establishment of Christianity, is next to be considered. It was a remarkable, and a great event. According to Christ's beautiful image, "The least of all seeds grew up, and waxed a great tree, and spread

* Psalm lxi.

† Blair.

spread out its branches, and filled the earth." *
 The hand of God sheltered this feeble plant from the storm; and by his care it was reared and cultivated, and brought to maturity. The wisdom and power of man united to oppose the doctrine of God; but it confounded the one, and overcame the other.

It is undoubtedly nothing less than miraculous, that twelve poor mechanics should disperse themselves into different parts of the world, to preach an unheard of religion, contrary to the laws every where established, and even to men's natural appetites and inclinations; and yet that this new religion should so far prevail, that, within twenty or thirty years after Christ's ascension, it should have gained footing in all the principal parts of the Roman empire; that churches of it should be settled not only at Jerusalem, but at Antioch, Smyrna, Corinth, Ephesus, Alexandria, and even at Rome itself: and that there should be, about three score years after, a still greater increase; for in Trajan's time, and in Bithynia, one of the most obscure parts of the Roman empire, the Christians were grown so many, that Pliny the proconsul was under the necessity of writing to the emperor for instructions how to treat them. In the next

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* Mark.

age it was the boast of the apologists, that Christianity was spread every way among the Indians, Mauritians, Getulians, Spaniards, and Britons; among the Sarmatians, the Daci, the Germans, and the Scythians. But that which appears most of all miraculous in the propagation of Christianity, is, that it was carried on through all these primitive stages, with all the meekness and tranquility of its own doctrine, without the least force, without the least sedition or tumult, and with no other authority, than merely a gentle influence upon men's minds, and an unconstrained conviction of their understandings.

LETTER XCV.

IN leading you through this long chain of investigation, I have often been obliged to pause and reflect, lest, in turning to the right or to the left, I should have rendered things obscure, by the winding and intricate path which I have often unavoidably been forced to pursue. The navigation in which we are engaged is too much obstructed by impediments, to permit us to proceed in a direct course.

The public establishment of Christianity at present bespeaks our consideration ; and it may well be considered as one of those important and extraordinary revolutions, which excite the most lively curiosity, and afford the most valuable instruction. The victories, and the civil policy of Constantine the Great, who first gave it an authoritative footing in the empire of the Romans, no longer influence the state of Europe ; but a considerable portion of the globe still retains,
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and the rest progressively will partake of, the impression received from the conversion of that monarch. The ecclesiastical institutions of his reign are still connected by an indissoluble chain with the opinions, the passions, and the interests of the present generation.

Constantius, the father, ended his life in the imperial palace of York ; and his son was elevated to the purple, by the soldiers in Britain, 25th July, 306. Two years after this, the Roman world was, for the first time, administered by six emperors : but what marks the period with the highest splendor, was the general adoption of the Christian faith. The British legions gave a sovereign, and what was still more important, gave the first Christian emperor to the world.

Constantine substituted the cross for the eagle, and ordered it to be borne on all shields : * and his veneration for that symbol led him to abolish one of the most detestable species of execution, that ever was introduced, crucifixion. Though it had subsisted from the earliest periods of antiquity, he prohibited it throughout the earth ; for such, almost,
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* Eusebius,

was the limits of his sway. "Supplicium crucis, quod primitus erat apud Romanos in usu, lege prohibuit."* Much, however, has been insinuated concerning the policy of Constantine, in manifesting so suddenly a predilection for the cross: to this he is said to have owed his nomination to the crown, and by it to have gained the successful issue of his struggles with his competitors.

The circumstances, respecting the cross which is recorded to have appeared to Constantine, are thus briefly related. While he was praying to the God of his father, and supplicating aid in his difficulties (then being on his march against Maxentius) and desiring that this unknown God would make himself known to him, there suddenly appeared a luminous figure of a cross, fixed upon the declining sun, visible not only to himself, but to all the soldiers who were with him, with this inscription, *τῷ νικῶντι*, "By this, conquer." Being astonished at this extraordinary appearance, and not knowing what to make of it, the night following Christ appeared to him in a dream, with the very same sign he had seen in the heavens, ordering him to make a military standard like it, and assuring him,

* Cassiodorus.

him, it would be his security in his battles. This cross was interpreted, by the Christians he consulted, to be the *symbol of immortality*, and the trophy of the victory which Christ, while he was on earth, had gained over death.

This story, however, although handed down to us, on the solemn asseveration of Constantine, and by a learned and illustrious prelate,* is not, I think, in all its parts to be implicitly credited. That Constantine and others might have seen a natural *Parhelion*, which sometimes has the appearance of a cross, is not at all improbable; or that fancy, or political ingenuity, might have traced out the Greek word of battle. Neither is it improbable, that he might have dreamed, as he related; for his mind was in great anxiety, and he looked up with eagerness for protection to the unknown God of his father. But I must think it in the highest degree improbable, that the founder of so peaceable a religion as the Christian, who solemnly declared, his kingdom was not of this world, and who expressly forbade his servants to fight for him, should in this manner put himself at the head of
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* Eusebius.

an army, and like Mahommed, establish his religion by the sword.*

Constantine, whether actuated by illusion, or impelled by policy, gave, however, other more substantial and unequivocal proofs of his belief in the truths of Christianity, and the beneficent tendency of its doctrines. He was the man who can claim the honour of the first edict, which condemned the art and amusement of shedding human blood.† This benevolent law, indeed, must be acknowledged to have expressed more the wishes of the prince, than to have reformed the abuse; an abuse which had run into an atrocious disease, which degraded a civilized nation below the condition of savage cannibals,‡ and which had become almost incurable. Several hundred, perhaps several thousand victims, were annually slaughtered in the great cities of the empire; and the month of December, more peculiarly devoted to the combats of gladiators, still exhibited to the eyes of the Roman people, a grateful spectacle of blood and cruelty. With such games, and within a few years afterwards, A. D. 404, Honorius, for the last time, polluted the amphitheatre at Rome.§

Christianity

* Priestly.

† Cod. Theodos.

‡ Gibbon.

§ Gibbon.

Christianity worked this happy reformation ; it preached equality, and on irrefragable principles, established the rights of man. Never could the poor Christian afterwards behold the amphitheatre at Nismes, that at Verona, or that at Rome, without reflecting, in the bitterness of sorrow, on the déluges of human blood, which had drenched their several arenas. How horrible that savage humour, which can be amused by murder ! How dreadful the lot of the world, when one despotic monster rules the uncontrollable lord of his country, and indulges, without restraint, his mischievous and unnatural propensities ! “ O that heaven and earth might perish with me when I die ! ” says Tiberius. “ How gratifying, to see men feel they are dying ! ” says his no less abominable successor, Caligula. “ Make even the friends and relations of the sufferers be always present,” says he, “ at their executions. O, father Jupiter, that the Roman people had but one neck, that I might dispatch them at a blow ! ”

To that religion shall we then refuse our gratitude, to which we owe, that such servile subjection now no longer subsists, as to admit the possibility of an amusing spectacle of gladiators ; and that a second Colisæum shall

shall never again be reared, a terrible memento of human depravity.

The exposition of children was also a prevailing and stubborn vice in antiquity. It was sometimes prescribed, often permitted, almost always practised with impunity; and even the dramatic poets, who appeal to the feeling heart, represent with indifference a popular custom, which was palliated by the fallacious motives of œconomy and compassion. The Roman empire was stained from one end of it to the other, with the blood of infants. It was every day practised in the provinces, and especially in Italy.* Christianity at length eradicated this inhuman practice also; Constantine put a stop to this crying enormity, by an edict.† This law, were there no other, remains an authentic monument of the vices and miseries of the times.‡

“Can there be greater barbarity,” says the moral Adam Smith, “than to hurt an infant? Its helplessness, its innocence, its amiableness, call forth the compassion even of an enemy; and not to spare that tender age, is regarded as the most

* Gibbon.

† Codex Theodosian.

‡ Gibbon.

most furious effort of an enraged and cruel conqueror. What then can we imagine the heart of a parent to have been, who could have injured that weakness, which even a furious enemy is afraid to violate? Yet the exposition, that is, the murder of new-born infants was an allowed practice in almost all the states of Greece and Rome: even among the polite and civilized Athenians, the abandoning one's child to hunger, or to wild beasts, was regarded without blame or censure. Nay, the loose maxims of the world tolerated not only this barbarous prerogative; but even the doctrine of philosophers, which ought to have been more just and accurate, instead of censuring, supported the horrible abuse, by far-fetched considerations of public utility. Aristotle, for instance, speaks of this practice as what the magistrate ought, upon many occasions, to encourage. Even the humane Plato is of the same opinion; and with all that love of mankind which seems to animate all his writings, he nowhere marks this practice with disapprobation." *

The end, then, that was put to the destruction of children by Christianity, speaks with the tongue of angels. But murder was in vogue among

* Theory of Moral Sentiments.

among all classes of antiquity, and was extended to all ages. "Such was the unhappy condition, even of Roman emperors," says Gibbon, "that whatever might be their conduct, their fate was commonly the same. A life of pleasure or virtue, of severity or mildness; of indolence or glory, alike led to an untimely grave; and almost every reign is closed by the same disgusting repetition of treason and murder. But there is one very early instance recorded, of the resplendent influence of Christianity. This honourable event (and I mention it because it is the first of the kind in the annals of the world) was the *public penance* of the emperor Theodosius, A. D. 390, for the massacre at Thessalonica. St. Ambrose, the archbishop, stopped him in the porch of the great church of Milan, as he was proceeding to pay his devotions in the accustomed manner; and in the tone and language of an ambassador from heaven, declared to him, that private contrition was not sufficient to atone for public guilt, or to appease the justice of the offended Deity. The emperor of the Romans, in consequence, stripped of his royalty, appeared in a mournful and suppliant posture; and, in the midst of the church of Milan, humbly solicited, with sighs and tears, the pardon of his sins."

Mr. Gibbon even allows, that this example of Theodosius may prove the beneficial influence of those principles, which could force a monarch, exalted above the apprehension of human punishment, to respect the laws and ministers of an invisible judge. But the principles of Christianity were destined to ascend to a still greater height, and to become at length the principles of the law of the whole empire. To live honestly, to hurt no one, and to render to every one his due, were points which until now had been utterly disregarded. To these three general precepts, however, Justinian reduced the general doctrine of law ; “ *Juris præcepta sunt hæc, honeste vivere, alterum non lædere, suum cuique tribuere.*” *

The ruin of Paganism, at the same time, in the age of Theodosius,† is perhaps the *only* example of the total extirpation of any ancient and popular superstition ; and is therefore to be considered as a memorable revolution in the human mind. In a full meeting of the senate, this emperor proposed, according to the forms of the republic, the important question, whether the worship of Jupiter, or that of Christ, should be the religion of the Romans ? On a regular division

* Inst. l. i. 3.

† A. D. 378. 395.

division of the senate, Jupiter was condemned, and degraded by the sense of a very large majority. The decrees of the senate accordingly, which proscribed the worship of idols, was ratified by the general consent of the Romans ; the splendor of the capitol was defaced, and the solitary temples were abandoned to ruin and contempt. Rome submitted to the yoke of the gospel : and so gentle, yet so rapid, was the fall of Paganism, that only twenty eight years after the death of Theodosius, the faint and minute vestiges of it were no longer visible even to the eye of the legislator.*

There is a natural connection between the various truths, which contribute to human felicity. Our passions and prejudices endeavour to disunite them, but by the eye of an attentive observer they may all be traced to one common origin. In consequence of this affinity, the truths and maxims which belong to the several spheres of government, legislation, morals, and religion, must be considered as mutually connected in the closest alliance ; and it is only by strengthening this natural coalition, that success can in any manner be insured. The wisest systems of administration, accordingly, have, on all

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occasions,

• Gibbon.

occasions, stood in need of the influence of an invisible spring to act in secret upon the consciences of men. The history of every nation upon earth bears testimony to the influence of religion on civil order, military discipline, good conduct, and moral action. And yet, says the justly respected and celebrated Mons. Necker, "It is only in modern times, that examples are to be furnished of attempts to contest the utility of religion, and to substitute, in the place of its beneficent and active influence, the inanimate instructions of an unprofitable philosophy."

The disciples of the ancient philosophy, we are told, asserted the rights of intellectual freedom; and their respect for the sentiments of their teachers was a liberal and voluntary tribute which they offered to superior reason: but that the Christian, on the contrary, formed a numerous and disciplined society, the jurisdiction of whose laws and magistrates was strictly exercised over the minds of the faithful; that the loose wanderings of the imagination were gradually confined by creeds and confessions; and that the freedom of private judgment was absolutely submitted to the public wisdom of synods.*

I cannot

* Gibbon.

I cannot, I confess, conceive why the historian here, as at every other opportunity, should take such indirect and cruel means to disturb, if not totally to eradicate those seeds of wholesome religion from the human breast, which from his own better reflection he must allow to have originated with Christianity? I do not accuse him, as others have done, of designedly striking at the very root of universal benevolence, or of blasting designedly every social disposition, and all the sweet charities of private life; but he must certainly be considered as very culpably inconsistent: he even neglects to adhere to an integrity of opinion; nor is his reasoning even logical, though it be unquestionably fashionable and convenient. Let councils be sneered at if he pleases; let synods and conclaves be turned into ridicule: we have no right to find fault with man, when he criticises man. But every one, surely the very weakest and humblest of us all, is called upon to assert, and to the extent of his ability to maintain, truth against error, and sound philosophy against sophistry and delusion.

Who, for instance, can look upon the abominations I have already mentioned, without shuddering with horror, and without being in some degree sensible of the bles-

sings of Christianity? Can the virtue of the ancient Greeks and Romans, in their most civilized state, bear a comparison, in several respects, with the manners of the Christian world? For example, it will not be pretended, that in any Christian country, a father is at liberty either to preserve his new-born infant, or to abandon it to famine and beasts of prey; that the massacre of slaves is made a part of the funeral solemnity in honour of great men deceased; that wretched obscenities form part of religious worship; that the most unnatural crimes are not only practised without shame, but celebrated by poets, and coolly mentioned as customary things, even by the gravest writers; that to gratify an ambitious profligate, inoffensive nations may be invaded, enslaved, or exterminated; that for the amusement of a few young soldiers, two or three thousand poor unarmed and innocent men may be murdered in one night, with the connivance, nay, and by the authority of the law; that the most worthless tyrants may be flattered with divine honours when alive, and worshipped as gods when dead; that prisoners of war may be enslaved, or impaled, or crucified, for having fought in defence of their country, and in obedience to their lawful rulers; or that men may be trained up for the purpose of cutting one another

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other to pieces by thousands and tens of thousands in a month, for the diversion of the public? *

Those, who are ever so little acquainted with ancient Greece and Rome, know I allude here, not to the depravity of individuals only, but to the universally avowed opinions, and fashionable practices of those celebrated nations. Surely Christian manners, then, censurable as we even confess them to be in many respects, are regulated by principles more conducive to present and to permanent felicity. And I will further venture to assert, that were they in all respects regulated, as they ought to be, by the pure principles of the gospel, we should not have the least hesitation to affirm, that the virtue of Christians would as far transcend that of the Greeks and Romans, as the arts and literature of England surpass those of New Zealand, or the land of the Hottentots.

At the approach of Christianity, all these abominations vanished. Among those who embraced it, heinous vices were rarely to be found; nay, to such an amazing degree of piety, charity, temperance, patience, and resignation, were the

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* Beattie.

primitive converts exalted, that they seem literally to have been regenerated, and purified from all the imperfections of human nature, and to have pursued such a constant and uniform course of devotion, innocence, and virtue, as in the present times it is almost as difficult for us to conceive, as to imitate. If it be asked, however, why the belief of the same religion does not now produce the same effects? I am concerned to say, the answer is short; because it is not believed: the most sovereign medicine can perform no cure, if the patient is not to be persuaded to take it.*

In the orgies of Bacchus, and in the rites of Ceres, as well as in the rites of other deities, one part of the mysteries consisted in the ceremony stiled *σποσάγυια*; at which time the participants eat the flesh quite crude with the blood. In Crete, at the Dionysiaca, it was customary to tear the flesh with the teeth from the animal, while alive. And this was done in commemoration of Dionysus. “Vivum lapiant dentibus taurum, crudeles epulas annuis commemorationibus excitantes.” In the island of Chios, it was a religious custom, to tear a man limb from limb, by way of sacrifice to this god. The same
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* Soame Jenyns.

obtained in Tenedos. To Saturn, to Ops, to Orpheus, the same sacrifices were offered. From all which, one sad truth is to be learnt, that there is scarcely any thing so impious, and so unnatural, as not at times to have prevailed in the ancient world.*

The game of human life, in every instance almost, went upon a high stake, and was played with a proportional ardour by these sanguinary people. To eradicate pity and compassion, and to have blood perpetually in view, was the general aim, and was certainly the most effectual way to harden the hearts of the spectators, and to annihilate the best impulses of morality. And thus we are clearly to understand, that it was not solely owing to the madness and depravity of a Tiberius, a Caligula, a Nero, or a Caracalla, that wickedness in their day was so universal. Had not the whole mass, had not the peasant, the soldier, the citizen, and the senator, as well as the prince, been foully tainted, the monstrous enormities of those vicious tyrants could never have been perpetrated.

The story of the Greeks and Romans, indeed, has been told by men, who have known how to
draw

draw our attention to the proceedings of the understanding, more than to the enormities of the conduct ; and who have exhibited characters as objects of admiration, in the midst of actions which we feel ought to be universally abhorred and condemned. But contemplate them, for a moment, taking arms, for instance, in the divisions of faction. The prevailing party supports itself, by expelling their opponents, by proscriptions, and by bloodshed. The usurper endeavours to maintain his station by the most violent and prompt executions. He is opposed, in his turn, by conspiracies and assassinations, in which the most respectable citizens are ready to use the dagger.* Now Lepidus gives up his brother to the vengeance of his colleague ; now Antony consents to the proscription of his uncle ; and now Augustus delivers up his friend, the incomparable Cicero. All the most sacred rights of nature are violated in this dreadful union. Three hundred senators, and above two thousand knights, are included in the terrible catalogue of death. A venerable man, even of the first order of nobility, begging to have the rites of burial after his death, Augustus replies, "Tell him, he shall find a grave in the vultures that shall devour him."

* Ferguson.

It is said, the best philosophy is that which instructs us in the duties of our station; in what is due to ourselves, and to the society we live in: thus the wise man will continue to think the world, what he has ever thought it; and what all but madmen have taken it for before him. The art, therefore, that teaches us to set our opinions at variance with our experience, is the art of tormenting ourselves with dexterity; our knowledge of the origin and end of life is limited; the happiness and misery, the meanness and grandeur of our state, we all feel too sensibly, to determine justly; every one, consequently, should be thoroughly satisfied he has his *quantum* of each accurately assigned him.*— This is a convenient mode of summing up a question. But it is either extremely profound, or I am unconquerably dull; for I can make very little better of it, than a yes and a no, very fairly entangled, if not incapable of separation. But, is it really to be said, that the practical duties which the Christian religion enjoins, are such as are not agreeable to our natural notions of God, and most perfective of the nature, and conducive to the happiness and well being of men? Christianity, surely, even in this single respect, if in no other, as containing completely, and in one consistent

* Material World.

consistent system, all the wise and good precepts that ever were taught, separately and unconnectedly, ought to be venerated and respected by all rational and considerate minds. To act steadily and systematically, even philosophers, in pursuing the consequences of their own principles, should give it the sanction of their fiat ; for they must allow it to be the best scheme that has ever been set up in the world, and on that account to be worthy of the highest respect, even though it had no external evidence of a divine origin.

Christians, however, are branded with the opprobrium of superstition. Many of them, I will allow you, deserve it ; and the disgraceful reason shall not be concealed. But is it to be superstitious, to adore one God, and to have none other gods but him ; to serve him in purity, and in righteousness ; and inoffensively to practise those duties, which true wisdom teaches to be absolutely essential to the harmony of society ? If this be superstition, give me leave to ask, whether the Heathens were not still more superstitious observers of all the ceremonials of their complicated systems ; and whether they did not look upon the neglect of them, as the greatest of all possible offences to the gods ? “ *Nihil enim magis arguere deos putabant, quam neglectas ceremonias inter-*

misnomerive solemn."* And were not these so abundantly multiplied, that the inanimated people of Rome were said to be more numerous than the animated? It is not worth while, indeed, seriously to bring under review their adulterous, thieving, and libidinous divinities; nor can I, with any degree of gravity, ask you, if you can conceive it possible that a whole nation could at any time have offered its adorations to a goat, a monkey, a cat, an onion, or a crocodile? But I may be permitted to demand, if there be in the whole range of Christian imbecility so monstrous a dereliction of good sense, as the solemn observation of the pecking of the sacred chickens, or the filthy examination of the viscera of a victim?

Extravagancies of this nature are really below notice. The contemptible, and endless catalogue, you will easily recollect. It were, however, worthy the attention of modern opponents of Christianity, to be, in consequence, somewhat correct in their decisions on the comparative merit of Christian and of Pagan absurdity. "For it is a certain mark of true religion," says Locke, "that it will prevail by its own light and strength. Now, says he, the Christian

* Livy.

Christian religion has not lost any of its first beauty, force, or reasonableness, by having been almost two thousand years in the world. Hence it is as capable now of prevailing by its own truth and light, as it was in the first ages of the church."

Every proposition of Scripture, though it may be sure, is not, I will confess, as evident as a principle of geometry. And hence we have not always demonstration. But in the doctrines of our Saviour, we never fail to experience the gentle and placid influence of eternal verity. Pure religion, is sound philosophy. It is right reason aided by the sublimest maxims. It is virtue herself put in action. This is acknowledged even by the hostile Doctor Morgan. "Christianity, says he, I take to be that most complete and perfect scheme of moral truth and righteousness, which was first preached to the world by Christ and his Apostles, and from them conveyed down to us under its own evidence, of immutable rectitude, wisdom, and reason. It is the revival of the religion of nature; and does not depend on miracles, or prophecies, or the sense and construction of ancient authors, who were full of mystery, and unintelligible: it consists in the inward, spiritual worship of one God, by a strict regard to all the

the duties and obligations of moral truth and righteousness, in opposition to all the animal affections, and mere bodily appetites ; and all this under the influence and hopes of a future state."

True, it is this, and nothing else. And will not this, then, satisfy the freethinkers ? Children have a fable given them to read, when they are at school, concerning the satyr, who blew alternately hot and cold. Hear, then, the doctor on the other side of the question ; for he, as well as his brethren, as you must have all along perceived, claim the privilege of alternately blowing hot and cold. When you throw out the religion of nature, says he, what Christianity have you left ; or what is Christianity, as distinguished from natural religion, or the obligations of moral truth and righteousness ? You tell me the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, and a future, eternal state of happiness or misery, was a peculiar principle of the Christian revelation, and that such was, strictly and properly, the life and immortality brought to light by the gospel. But, in answer, I say, this doctrine, as Christ himself and the Apostles preached it, was believed before, by all the Pharisees, who were then the main body of the nation. It was believed

lieved by the Jews, from the days of Esdras; who was contemporary with Zoroaster, and who also preached it to the Persians four hundred years before the Messiah. It was believed by the eastern Magi, who taught the unity of God; likewise, many hundred years before Zoroaster. All this is clearly proved in Dr. Hyde's Book *De Religione Veterum Persarum*. Even Christ himself more than once declared, he came not to set aside, or destroy the law, or to introduce any new religion; and St. Paul, his great expositor; shews, that the whole design of Christ's mission was to restore the old religion, and the true Abrahamic righteousness, by which Abraham, Noah, Enoch, and all good men, from the beginning of the world, had been justified and accepted of God.*

Sober thinking men have sometimes been charged with studying in order to believe; but what are we to say of those who study, in order to disbelieve? It is an inconceivable perversion of the understanding. And what renders it still more extraordinary is, that there is not one of the whole phalanx of these free-thinkers who does not furnish arguments, were they wanting, for his own condemnation. So little guarded, indeed,

are

* Moral Philosopher.

are they, or so weakly armed for the fight, that they are invariably found turning their weapons upon themselves, and most unmercifully slashing and hacking the unhappy phantoms of their own imaginations.

Philosophers of all sects in antiquity, as I have often repeated, differed: the Christian religion alone has taught consistently. It has taught, if I may be permitted again to say it, better and nobler truths, and with more clearness and authority, than philosophy ever did. It is the telescope, as it were, which brings to nearer view, and sets in a fuller light, those sublime verities, which the naked eye of reason could never distinctly, and sufficiently discern. It embraces, in the bands of love, the whole human race, not only of every country, but of every age. It is that which would prepare happiness for those who now sleep in non-existence, and for those future generations with whom we shall have no connection. In a word, it is that which inspires us with the consolation to know, that though life may have been long enough for much personal and immediate evil, rather than for much personal and immediate good, yet, that at our last moments we do not die insol-

vent, but that we die in hope, and leave a glorious inheritance to posterity.

Let no man conceive, then, that there is any thing forbidding in the Christian character. There is no dignity of soul, no perfection of nature, that is not cherished by its genuine doctrines. They inspire, they command every thing essential to the good of man, in his individual, as well as in his collective capacity. They alone give that consistency and stability of character, which can be acknowledged universally beneficial. The true Christian, without witnesses, and with the most seductive temptations in his way, acts with as rigid uprightness, as if he had the whole world spectators of his conduct. He is not sullen; no gloom hangs about him, no melancholy austerity, tending to withdraw him from human society, or to diminish the exertions of active virtue. To all moral virtues it adds a venerable and authoritative dignity. It renders the virtuous character more august: to the decorations of a palace, it joins the majesty of a temple.*

“But it makes men cowards,” says the historian of the Roman empire. “Thus, as every
act

act of dissimulation must be painful to an ingenuous spirit, the profession of Christianity increased the aversion of Julian for a religion, which oppressed the freedom of his mind, and compelled him to hold a conduct repugnant to the noblest attributes of human nature, sincerity and courage." * Marechal Turenne, on the opposite side observes, "A life truly Christian, is not incompatible with the profession of arms. Piety is so far from enfeebling valour, that it on the contrary augments it." "In the day of battle, it has been remarked," says even a Heathen, "that those feared the enemy the least, who most feared the gods." † Which is the most competent judge among these contending authorities, I shall not determine. It was Celsus, however, who first had the sagacity to observe, that Christianity makes men cowards. But it never was attempted to be argued, that a religion of peace should afford us directions for the arranging of fleets and armies. As well might it be supposed to comprehend the circle of the arts and sciences. Religion is one thing, policy is another. Religion opposes itself to vice, policy to violence. Hence the precepts of a doctrine which tends to make us affectionate parents, dutiful children, faithful friends, and worthy citizens,

M 2

citizens,

* Gibbon.

† Xenophon.

citizens, must promote virtue; and virtue, I should think, cannot but make us brave.* But observe, I do not deny, that Celsus might have been a brave man.

It is not, however, from the prejudiced imagination, man is to look for the noble and independent energy of action. I am not to learn, it is not exclusively in the ideal world, we are to seek for the means of acting in the material world. It is in common sense, in experience, and in truth, we must chiefly search for those things which are really useful and advantageous to society. If we be desirous of forming good citizens, brave, faithful, industrious, and zealous for their country, we certainly shall not labour to inspire their infancy with ill-founded fears of death. On the contrary, we shall speak to them of the immortality of gallant and courageous souls. We shall press on their conviction, that immortality as the divine reward of honourable labour and patriotic service. We shall instruct them, that the virtuous and the great man is not only to enjoy the love and admiration of his contemporaries, but that his ashes are ever to be venerated by those, from whom alone approbation is to be desired.

A book

* Bishop Watson.

A book of disastrous notoriety,* to which we have too often been obliged to advert, closes its baneful argument with a pious burst of philanthropy, which it would fix upon the world, as the wholesome fruit, the bright product of its own chaste deductions. But never was there a more futile attempt. To forgiving Christianity it owes the only truths it is able to bring forward. To Christianity, in the hour of its sterility and need, it stretched forth its hands, and thence, as from the common source of all, it drew forth those comforts, which it would willingly force the world to believe the offspring of its own barren incredulity.

“O man,” says this pretended philanthropist, “give yourself up to nature and humanity. Scatter the way of your life with flowers. Cease to think of what is to be in futurity. Live for yourself, and for your fellow-creatures. Look into your own mind; look into those you are to live with. But leave those divinities, which can afford nothing to augment your felicity. Be just, for equity is the prop of the human race. Be good, for goodness binds all hearts. Be indulgent, because, feeble yourself, you live with beings equally feeble. Be sweet tempered, for

M 3

sweetness

* Syst. de la Nature.

sweetness attracts affection. Be grateful, because gratitude nourishes and cherishes bounty. Be modest, for pride is offensive to the wise. Pardon injuries, for vengeance eternizes hatred. Do good to him who injures you, to shew the superior dignity of your own mind, and to make him your friend. Be discreet, temperate, and chaste, for voluptuousness, intemperance, and excess, not only destroy the frame, but injure the reputation. Be a good citizen, because your country is necessary to your well-being, your security, and your pleasures. Be patient and obedient to lawful authority, because this is necessary to the preservation of society, and consequently to your own. Be obedient to the laws, because they are the dictates of the public will, to which your individual will must be subordinate. Defend your country, for it is that country, which renders you happy, and secures your property, and all that is most dear to you. In a word, be a Man. Be a being, sensible, and of reason. Be a faithful husband, a tender father, an equitable master, a zealous citizen. Labour to serve your country, and be assured, the tissue of your days will be happy."

What

What is the moral part of this counsel, but an echo of the precepts of Christianity? What is it, but, in other words, saying, "O man, be a Christian?"

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LETTER XCVI.

MORALITY is the noblest, the best, and the only immortal distinction of man. It has even by some been said, that man is more distinguished from the animal world by morality, than by reason; as several brute creatures discover in their actions something like reason, but nothing that bears the least affinity to morality.* This is undoubtedly true: nor can it, with any shadow of reason, be asserted, that the grace of God, in the Christian dispensation, releases men from the laws of nature. This, indeed, would be to discard the primary obligations to piety and virtue. For, can there be transgression where there is no law, and consequently no obedience?

Religion, whatever be the opinion of bigots, I have always thought, ought to be no farther considered than as it contributes to morality.

* Addison.

ality. But, the conduct of the early Christians, it is said, was extremely reprehensible. The meekness and resignation which had distinguished the primitive disciples of the gospel, were the objects of the applause, rather than of the imitation of their successors. These latter had contracted the insolent vices of prosperity, and the habit of believing, that the saints alone were entitled to reign over the earth.* Their clergy were a lawless tribe. They broke the laws in the most public manner, and instigated others to break them, by popular insurrections against the authority of magistrates, and by tumults and riots, in which they insulted the established religion of the empire. The list of martyrs, hence, consisted more of those who suffered for breaking the peace, than of those who suffered quietly for the sake of their religion.†

Moreover, has not Christianity, we are asked, given cause for such divisions, and such wars, that it would have been better for mankind had it never existed? Has it not caused the most detestable assassinations? one for example, the most horrible that was ever perpetrated among men, the massacre of Saint Bartholomew? Has it not shed more innocent, or rather more vir-

tuous

* Gibbon.

† Bolingbroke.

tious blood, in the persecution of heretics, (for men must be virtuous in an eminent degree, who submit to be burnt alive, rather than be guilty even of dissimulation) than the falsest and most sanguinary system of the ancients? Torqueta, that infernal inquisitor of Spain, brought into the Inquisition, in the space of fourteen years, no fewer than 80,000 persons, of whom 6000 were condemned to the flames, and burnt alive, with the greatest pomp and exultation. In the reign of the English fury, Mary, a young man having been inadvertently betrayed by a priest to deny transubstantiation, absconded. Bonner, the merciless Bonner, threatened ruin to the father, if he did not deliver up the young man. The son, hearing of his father's danger, made his appearance, and was burnt alive, instead of being rewarded for his filial piety. A woman, during the same reign, was delivered in the midst of the flames: one of the guards snatched the infant from the fire, but the magistrate, who attended the execution, ordered it to be thrown back; being resolved, he said, that nothing should survive, which sprung from a parent so obstinately heretical. Even Father Paul computes, that in the Netherlands alone, from the time that the edict of Charles V. was promulgated against the Reformers, 50,000 persons were hanged, beheaded,

buried

buried alive, or burnt on account of religion.*

These are all crying and most deplorable enormities, such as Christianity may well blush at; and had they continued, it might too justly have been said, it had been better that Christianity had never existed. But may we not, in some respects, say the same of society in general? For, because governments have at times caused the blood of man to flow, and that too on slight provocations, should we be warranted in saying, that it would be better for the world were it unfettered by government altogether? The abuses of authority are not to be confounded with the wholesomeness of necessary legislation. Because there has been abundance of folly and falsehood in the world, we are not to say that there is neither truth nor wisdom in the world. Ancient frauds, or modern extravagancies, have no reference to genuine Christianity, nor any connection with the simplicity and purity of its doctrines. It is, therefore, uncandid to turn against Christianity the evils, which the ambitious and wicked have brought upon mankind, but which the system itself deplores, and in the fulness of its charity opposes.

When,

* Kaim's Sketches of the Hist. of Man.

When, a few centuries after the Apostolic age, partly by the craft of man, and partly by circumstances peculiar to times of ignorance and trouble, this religion came to be almost effaced by superstition, it then lost its sanctifying influence; and furious passions, unjustifiable wars, and horrid massacres, disgraced Europe. But, was this owing to Christianity? On the contrary, it was owing to the want of Christianity. Refer to the New Testament; produce from it, if you can, a single passage that gives countenance to persecution or massacre. If you cannot; if, on the contrary, you find, that our Saviour and his Apostles invariably recommend, and by the most awful sanctions enjoin, compassion, justice, forbearance, forgiveness, meekness, mercy, and charity, declaring, that without these virtues men are not Christians, be their professions what they may; surely candour ought to impute the evils complained of, not to the religion itself, but to the depravity or folly of those wretched men, who have corrupted or disguised it by unwarrantable additions and misrepresentations, or who, knowing the power of religion over the human heart, have made use of its venerable name for the more effectual accomplish-

ment of their own ambitious, sensual, and avaritious purposes.*

I have always thought it one of the glories of Christianity, that the piety it teaches is solid and rational, remote from all superstitious extremes, worthy of a God of infinite wisdom and goodness to require, and becoming the true dignity of the reasonable nature to put in practice. It comprehends, not only immediate acts of devotion towards God, but a diligent performance of all relative duties, and the faithful discharge of the various offices incumbent upon us in civil and social life. It requires us, to bear with a noble fortitude, the greatest evils; but not rashly to expose ourselves to them, to inflict them upon others, or to bring them unnecessarily upon our own heads.

Were there but one man upon earth, he would not, it is allowed, stand in need of any prescribed form of worship. His would be an inward devotion. But, as a social animal, the surest bond to hold the different members of society to their respective duties, is the sacred bond of religion. Even the Heathens found, government and society could not subsist without it. Plutarch

stiles

* Bishop Porteus.

stiles it "the cement of all community, and the chief basis of all legislative power." Had it not been for this, together with our natural impressions concerning justice and probity, instead of those well ordered governments and cities, which are now in the world, mankind must have lived either wild and solitary in caves, or else in troops of robbers, subsisting upon the spoil and rapine of such as were weaker than themselves. "*Pietate sublata, fides etiam, et societas humani generis, et una excellentissima virtus justitia tollitur.*"* And hence, in addition to such unavoidable eradication of good faith and justice, the civil law made the abuse of religion a common injury. "*Religio contaminata ad omnium pertinet injuriam.*"

If, then, to inform the understanding, and to regulate the will, be lasting and diffusive benefits, what do we not owe to unadulterate Christianity? Its respectable ministers are the philosophers, their churches are their schools, and their sermons are their lectures. How would the hearts of Socrates and Tully have rejoiced, had they lived in a nation, where the law had made provision for philosophers to read lectures of morality and theology, every seventh day, in several

* Cicero.

veral thousands of schools, erected at the public charge, throughout the whole country; at which lectures, all ranks and sexes, without distinction, were called upon to be present for their general improvement! And how culpable towards the best interests of society, would they not have held those men, who should have endeavoured to defeat the purpose of so divine an institution! You cannot but remember the remarkable words of Alexander: "You have not done well," says he to Aristotle, in one of his letters, during his Persian conquests, "to publish your books of Select Knowledge; for what is there now, in which I can surpass others, if those things which I have been instructed in are communicated to every body? For my own part, I declare to you, I would rather excel others in knowledge than in power."*

"The church has been in every age," says Bolingbroke, "an hydra; such a monster as the poets feign with many heads. All those heads have hissed and barked, and tore one another with fury. As fast as some were cut off others have sprouted out; and all the art and all the violence employed to create an apparent, could never create a real, uniformity. The scene

* Plutarch, Aulus Gellius.

scene of Christianity has been always a scene of dissention, of hatred, of persecution, and of blood." This, it is not to be denied, has been, till of late, but too true a portrait. The most furious and the most desperate contests have been among sectaries of religion. In the supposed holy cause, they have felt neither fear nor remorse. The justice of their arms, have hardened them against the sentiments of humanity: The workings even of their bigotted, though vigorous minds, have rendered them greedy of every pretence of hatred and persecution.

The purity and simplicity of Christianity, indeed, have been every where abused. It has been made a ladder of ambition by churchmen, and an engine of government by statesmen; and though by its moral influence it has strengthened the bonds of society, yet has its spirit been depressed and weighed down by the earthly principles of every civil institution.* It hath been well said, Let us not humanize God; let us not measure his perfections by ours, much less ascribe to him, under the notion of justice, what would be cruelty in man. For is it not too frequently seen, that we bring down the Divinity nearly to our own level, and measure his proceedings

* Bishop Watson.

ceedings by our own. It cannot be denied, God and man have been, too often, most impiously brought within familiar, and unpardonable degrees of comparison. It is not my wish that any man should shut his eyes against the abuses of Christianity. The voice of ambitious and misguided men hath covered the earth with blood. What thousands were massacred, for the single word consubstantiation ! What thousands for the worship of images ! What butcheries were made of the heretical Manichæans ! What horrors in the crusades ! What sanguinary atrocities in the massacre of Ireland ! What merciless destruction among the Mexicans and other Indians ! And last, but not least of all, what hellish practices by the holy office ! None of these should ever be forgotten. They were as distant, as heaven is from earth, from the precepts of Christianity. However great the opprobrium, they should never be forgotten, for they should always serve as a warning to posterity, and as a safeguard to those who shall come after us.

But let us not accuse religion, because Christians have frequently sunk even below the barbarism of unenlightened humanity. It is no easy matter to divest a keeper of the keys of

heaven, of pride ; a conqueror, of ambition ; a courtier of jealousy ; or an enthusiast of insanity. Yet religion is not to be stigmatized, because, contrary to its express tenets, its professors have been vicious and abandoned. Nature, now and then, we know, casts forth monsters. The elements generate earthquakes, pestilences, and plagues. But the beauty of the one harmonized and perfect whole, is not indelibly and irreparably effaced by the mischiefs of any casual disaster. The eulogium of the Christian religion is to be read in the universal adoption, or the tacit confession of the most enlightened people of the world. And is not this sufficient ?

But, passing from the *suaviter in modo* to the *fortiter in re*, the latitudinarian declares all those who are for positive precepts in religion, to be nothing more nor less than demonists. Nay, he represents divines, in all ages, as, for the most part, mortal enemies to the exercise of reason, and even considerably below brutes. * Those who acknowledge the divine authority of the Christian religion, as taught in the New Testament, says the moral philosopher, are Christian Jews, under an inevitable incapacity of thinking,
and

* Dr. Tindal.

and possess absolutely nothing more than an historical, political, clerical, and mechanical faith and religion. Even the very ablest, and the most honest among them, must be considered as disqualified for fair reasoning by their prejudices. Bolingbroke, again, represents metaphysical divines and philosophers, as having wandered many hundred years in imaginary light, but all the time in real darkness. He frequently charges them with blasphemy, and with having staggered about, and jostled one another, in their dreams. Of the ancient fathers, says he, the greatest of them were unfit to write or speak on any subject that required closeness of reasoning, an evangelical candour, or even common ingenuousness. And of the more modern divines, he asserts, that they have been merely declaimers; who have had little respect for their readers; who have been hired to defend the Christian system; and who have sought nothing more than the honour of the gown, by having the last word in the dispute.

It is allowable, as I have always granted, for sincere and impartial enquirers after truth, to differ, when they see occasion, from persons of high reputation for knowledge and learning, whether ancient or modern. . . And sometimes it, is

even of essential utility to point out their errors, lest the authority of great names should lead men from truth. But how can we consistently reconcile the moderate demeanour even of a Hume (stigmatized by himself, indeed, as an idle dialectician) to his expressions, when, concluding his *Essay* with plaudits of his own performance, he thinks it may serve to confound those dangerous friends, or disguised enemies, to the Christian religion, who would undertake to defend it by the principles of human reason? "Our most holy religion," says he, "is founded on faith, not on reason; and it is a sure method to expose it, to put it to the trial of reason." *

Our modern philosophers may have been warranted in disdaining to be chained to the fallible opinions of any set of men whatever. But although good sense may be a very respectable evangelist, it is surely not quite right to unhinge us altogether. As long as to them it shall seem meet, let them, in the name of peace, be the echoes of the Lyceum and the Portico; the erudite renovators of systems which have all perished from insufficiency. But why, in common charity, will they not let unpresuming Christians remain in tranquility? Christianity desires nothing more

* Philosophical Essays.

more than inoffensively to practise its social duties, and thankfully to employ its pure morality. Are these men themselves inspired ? Or must we believe, that their intellect has been peculiarly deputed to earth by the Lord of the Universe ? Would it not be really too much, to grant them what they refuse to the Son of God ? Moreover, where are the extraordinary and visible signs of their humility, their charity, their patience, and their disinterestedness ? But they are honest men, we are told, and they are benevolent and upright in their dealings. . They are neither stimulated by pride, by ambition, nor by vanity. All this I have nothing to do with ; and I know very well, that a bad cause derives no injury from the virtues of its advocate.

But what am I to think of men, who seem to rail at Christianity merely on account of its manifold perfections ? And here do not impute to me, I beseech you, a degree of vehemence beyond the occasion. There is, at all times, you may confidently believe me, serious danger to be apprehended from writings, which throw out contemptuous insinuations against Christianity, as if it could not bear the light, or stand the test of an impartial inquiry ; and as if every man of sense, who examines into first principles without

prejudice, must immediately see through its delusion. Such writings, and from authors of abilities and fine taste, are too apt to do mischief among those, who, without any uncommon abilities, and without giving themselves the trouble of much thinking, would pass for persons of extraordinary penetration, who are raised above vulgar prejudices. It is dangerous to let loose the multitude. Even in the best things, it was long a favourite maxim among philosophers, not to enlighten them too much, as it was really impossible to enlighten them sufficiently. Among these, there are particularly three sorts of people, concerning whom it is very doubtful whether they can ever be instructed : these are, the prejudiced, who always reason falsely ; the ignorant herd, who cannot reason at all ; and the incredulous, who doubt and contradict every principle, even the most evident. In fact, the cultivation of reason is an arduous task ; and hence men of lively fancy, finding it easier to follow the impulse of passion than the dictates of reason, endeavour to persuade themselves and others, that passion is still more natural than reason. He is a narrow-minded bigot, I will allow you, who judges of men and things, merely from the contracted principles of his own sect. But what is he, on the other hand, let me ask you, who, in possession

possession of general principles, deals wanton condemnation on the same narrow and illiberal scale? It is a blessing, undoubtedly, that some will think. It is happy even for those, who indolently suffer the heaven-lighted spark of reason to rest like a lamp in a sepulchre, that some virtuous habits at least, which the reason of others has shackled them with, should supply its place. These must, however, be unequivocally and substantially good, and must decidedly bear the legal stamp, and general currency of common sense, and of the common interests of mankind. But, wisdom, virtue, morality, and all the dearest hopes of man, both here and hereafter, out of the question, were authority, and authority alone, to decide the cause, let us see how it would stand. It were easy to produce, on the side of Christianity, in the first instance, an unequalled number of great names, whose learning and good sense, and eminent merit, are universally acknowledged. I will not, indeed, include among them any of the clergy, because they may, perhaps, be excepted against as interested men; although, if extensive learning and knowledge; if great candour and probity of manners; or if strength of understanding, and elegance of taste in polite letters, might recommend them as fit to be named in these matters, many of them might be

named, so eminently and confessedly gifted in these respects, as would render them ornaments to any profession. But it cannot be liable to the same objection, to mention the illustrious characters who have either professedly written in defence of Christianity, or who have, in their writings, shewn an high esteem and veneration for Christianity. Of foreigners, among a multitude that might be referred to, I shall merely take notice of Du Plessis Mornay, who was both a wise statesman, and an eminently learned man; the celebrated Pascal, one of the finest writers and greatest geniuses of the last age; the illustrious Grotius, not easily to be paralleled for force and extent of ability, as well as for variety of erudition; those great men, Puffendorf and Spanheim; the former deservedly admired for his great knowledge of the law of nature and nations; the latter, peculiarly eminent for his accurate knowledge and refined taste in the polite parts of learning. Those, indeed, who may be deemed our contemporaries, have at times already occurred to us; and concerning them I shall be silent. But I cannot omit pointing out to you a few of the distinguished ornaments of our own nation; such as Bacon, Selden, Hale, Boyle, Locke, Newton, Clarendon, Hardwicke, Sydney, Coke, Lyttleton, and others.

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Does a man, then, risque the chance of much delusion, when he would weigh with attention the arguments which could have struck conviction into such powerful understandings? Or are such sublime geniuses, the very contemptible reasoners whom free-thinkers would teach us to consider as prejudiced, uninformed, disqualified for discrimination, and deficient in perspicacity and judgment? Intemperate men, indeed, may rail; and indecent men may abuse; but, believe me, a sensible and an humble Christian, who has sufficient opportunities of informing his mind, and is well disposed to improve them, will feel no discredit in being ranked as the follower of the best heads, and the worthiest hearts; as the contented and unassuming imitator of those who could be satisfied to explain what they understood, to adore what they understood not, and to leave in mystery all that Christ and his apostles have thought proper to leave so.

A religion, founded on the authority of a divine mission, and confirmed by prophecies and miracles, indisputably appeals to facts; and the facts must be proved, as all other facts, that pass for authentic, are proved. If they be proved, the religion will prevail without the assistance of logic or metaphysics; if they be not proved, the
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authority of it will sink in the world, and it will speedily be wiped from the face of the earth. The best and wisest men, in all ages, have always recommended, in this manner, a calm attention and sobriety of mind, and a disposition towards a cool and impartial examination and inquiry, as the best qualifications for the discovery of truth.

Shaftesbury, however, in the most airy, though not in the most decorous way, commends the poetical parts of Scripture, as he calls them, Job, the Psalms, and Proverbs, and says, they are full of humorous discourses, and jocular wit. The sacred writers, says he, had invariably recourse to pleasantry and diversion, as the proper means to promote religion, and the only way to strengthen the established faith. And what, indeed, is amusing to the highest pitch of luxury, continues he, “is the sharp, witty, and humorous discourses of our Saviour.” Or, if they are to be surpassed, it is only by the “certain air of festivity” with which he did his miracles; the very recital of which is sufficient “to move in a most pleasant manner.”* What was laughter to this unthinking peer, however, has been death to millions. The ridicule falls, indeed,

* Characteristics.

deed, innoxious, when considered by intelligent and thinking men ; but, impressed upon harmless, unsuspecting, and uninformed minds, it unhappily has the faculty of creating contempt, and of establishing a disregard to things of unspeakable benefit and importance. Too many instances, in every quarter, present themselves, of persons, who have been laughed out of their religion, their honesty, and virtue. Weak and unstable understandings have even been driven into atheism, profanation, and vice, by the force of ridicule ; nay, many have been made ashamed of that, which they otherwise would have esteemed their greatest and their most permanent glory.

The principle, however, upon which this elegant and subtle, but inconsequent writer, hath reared his faulty edifice, is, that “ false earnest is ridiculed ; but that the false jest passes secure.” And thus, says he, “ I cannot conceive how any man can be “ laughed out of his wits, though it is possible, some may have been frightened out of their wits.” The noble Lord, notwithstanding, did not conclude with the soundness of philosophy, when he ventured to advance such extraordinary positions. Nor did he, it should seem, advert even to the suggestions of common sense, which from daily obser-

2 vation,

vation, would have instructed him differently. But I need go no farther for his reputation than to his own expositor, to his votary, his pious élève, the unintimidated and lively antichristian Voltaire. Believing in no eternal Providence, and consequently carping at religion, yet this sneering philosopher built, at Ferney, a church for the benefit of the humble believer ; and over its portal he wrote, as you may recollect, *Deo erexit Voltaire.*

Free-thinkers, free-reasoners, therefore, or the only men of sense, as they are pleased to call themselves, existing, may look upon the Christian, as the swan of the ancient poets was considered, who could rise to the clouds on downy wings, and sing a sweet, but gentle and plaintive note of thanksgiving ; while they, as eagles, would soar to the skies on bold and sounding pinions, nor would fear even to perch on the sceptre of Jupiter, or to bear, in their pounces, the lightning of the god.

On all occasions it has invariably been held true, that the mind must be well furnished with elementary ideas, before it can bring forth conclusions that can be generally admitted. All kinds of useful abstraction must result from experience,

perience, and from deductions unequivocally made. And, therefore, it is but justice in us to be grateful to those from whom we have borrowed those essential lights, of which even now we should otherwise feel the want, notwithstanding our extended information. And on this ground it is that we, with pride and satisfaction, should look back on that source from which we have in reality derived our best instruction. Our forefathers, previous to the dawn of Christianity, turned, we know, from necessity to the traditional tale, or to the song of the bard, for the articles of their belief. But the Christian creed comes to us in that unquestionable shape, that it instantly and universally accords with the first sentiments of the human heart, without any foreign aid.

“Enthusiasm built up old, and enthusiasm built up new Rome,” says Warburton. “Profane history tells us, that when the city had not six miles of dominion beyond its walls, it indulged the dream of universal monarchy. And we learn from ecclesiastical history also, that when the jurisdiction of the bishops of Rome extended not beyond a small diocese, they yet entertained the celestial vision of a popedom.”*

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* Divine Legat. of Moses.

This is true. But the Apostles, and the first propagators of Christianity, did not set this example to the bishops ; nor did they, as I have before noticed, like Romulus, open an asylum for debtors, thieves, and murderers ; for they had not the same means, even if they had possessed the inclination, to secure their adherents from the grasp of civil authority. They did not persuade men to abandon the temples of the gods, because they could there obtain no expiation for their guilt ; for every degree of guilt was expiated there with infinite facility ; and every vice was practised without remorse of private conscience, if I might not even venture to say, with the powerful sanction of public approbation.

Of the Apostolic ministry, however, I have already spoken. But the missionaries, the subsequent expounders of the gospel, says Mr. Gibbon, “ after the example of their Divine Master, addressed themselves, at all times, to men, and especially to women, oppressed by the consciousness, and very often by the effects, of their vices.” Now is this not an unparalleled, and wanton perversion of historic truth ? The gospel was not preached in single houses, or obscure villages ; not in subterraneous caves, or impure brothels ;

brothels ; not in lazars or prisons, but in the synagogues, and in the temples, in the streets, and in the market places of the great capitals of the Roman world.* But it is with some writers too common a practice, invidiously to detract from that merit, which has rendered great and disinterested characters, objects of approbation to their fellow-creatures.

The noblest propriety of conduct may, it is true, be supported in adversity as well as in prosperity. But as the first is much more difficult than the latter, it is surely upon that account more admirable. Perils and misfortunes are not only the proper school of heroism, they are the only proper theatre which can exhibit its virtues to advantage, and draw upon it the full applause of the wise and good. Can there be shame in that distress, which is brought upon men without any fault of their own, and in which they behave with firmness, and unsullied integrity ? The generous mind cannot but exultingly admire, even in contemplation, those vanquished difficulties, in which, from no rashness of their own, the unfortunate have been involved. How gratefully will he adore the bounty of the Divine Being, who could endue them with virtues, so suitable
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* Bishop Watson.

to their situation. Were the trial pleasure, they have had temperance given them, to refrain from it ; were it pain, they have had constancy given them to bear it ; were it danger or death, they have had magnanimity and fortitude given them to despise it.

An upright and a determined spirit never complains of the destiny of Providence, nor thinks the universe in confusion, though he be out of order himself. He does not look upon himself, according to what self-love would suggest, as a whole, separated and detached from every other part of nature, to be taken care of by itself, and for itself. He regards himself in the light, in which he imagines the great Ruler of human nature, and of the world, regards him. He enters, if I may say so, into the sentiments of that Divine Being, and considers himself as an atom, a particle of an immense and infinite system, which must, and ought to be disposed of, according to the conveniency of the whole. Assured of the wisdom which directs all the events of human life, whatever lot befalls him, he accepts it with joy, satisfied that, if he had known all the connections, and dependencies of the different parts of the universe, it is the very lot which he himself would have wished for : if
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it be life, he is contented to live; and if it be death, as nature has no farther occasion for his presence here, he willingly goes where he is appointed.*

In the primitive Christian missionary, therefore, we may contemplate the greatest resolution productive of the most assiduous and painful exertions. Impressed by the deepest sense of duty, and eager to diffuse that divine light of revelation, which burned with undiminished heat in his own breast, he disengaged himself from the strong attachments to his native country, and went forth to convert an idolatrous world. As his life was devoted to the interests of his religion, all the causes by which its pains are aggravated, or its continuance shortened, were stripped of their terror. His imagination presented to him the scourge, the rack, and the cross; yet was his resolution unshaken by the apprehensions of persecution and death. At the loud and solemn calls of duty, he was loosened even from the ties of consanguinity; and with a spirit elevated above common mortality, he suffered principle to predominate over affection, turned aside from the tears of friendship, and was even deaf to the tender supplications of

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love.

* Adam Smith.

love. The bright object of his ambition was not the barren praise of inflexible constancy, but the crown of immortal happiness. The dangers of travel, the precariousness of subsistence, the perfidy of pretended friends, and the violence of open enemies, were, in his estimation, no more than light afflictions, which endure for a moment. Lost in the solitude of the wilderness, exposed to the tempests of the ocean, or assailed by the outrage of the multitude, he was not destitute and forsaken, for the Almighty was his guide, and his comforter.' With patience he saw the frowns of the great, and heard the scoffs of the vulgar. He proclaimed, with the unshaken confidence of truth, the wondrous tidings of the new dispensation, and exhorted a guilty race to repentance and amendment. Elate with the accomplishment of his pious task, in bringing many sheep to the fold of Christ, he gloried amid the flames of martyrdom, and breathed out his soul with joy. *

This is, indeed, I will allow you, but an uninviting picture to the little Epicurean being self, which would always repose in the voluptuous lap of luxury, and, heroically disdainful of the fate of its fellow-creatures, would never interrupt

interrupt the repetition of the *jucunda oblivia vite*.* But can the greatest unbelievers deny, that Europe has been civilized and enlightened, by the missionaries who are thus traduced? Or can the classical Pyrrhonist deny, that not only the Romans, but the very conquerors of the Romans, have each of them been indebted in gratitude to the same harmonizing source? Let us, however, pay some attention to the early institutions of Christianity; and from them we shall, perhaps, be able to gather up something satisfactory towards the decision of this question.

* Horace.

LETTER XCVII.

CHRISTIANITY constantly addresses us as men, rarely as citizens ; the only duty it requires of us under that character, is submission to the governing power in general ; it prescribes no rule for our political conduct. The first Christians saw that their religion was not of this world, and refused to have any concern with public affairs, unless in obedience. They inquired not into the rights of those who ruled, nor of their own to liberty ; and wished for nothing, but to pass through this life unincumbered with its business, and well prepared for a better. So long as they were a small sect, dissenting from the religions of the countries in which they lived, this inoffensive conduct was easily preserved ; but when their doctrines became almost universal, these principles of inactivity were no longer tenable, without the total dissolution of all order ; for, if no man would govern, there could

could be no government. Necessity, therefore, obliged them to take a part; and this soon awakened ambition and love of power, those passions so natural to the human heart, and induced them to seize the whole; Christianity was thus established; in consequence, corrupted; and little of it shortly remained, except the name.

To this opinion of the incompatibility of Christianity with the occupations and customs of the world, were many of those numerous monastic institutions, which every where accompanied its progress, indebted for their origin; institutions, at first certainly favourable to the genuine and unassuming spirit of Christianity; and which, had they been confined to those few, who were capable of employing solitude to advantage, would undoubtedly have been conducive to the practice of every Christian virtue. But as all men were indiscriminately admitted, who pretended to sanctity, or who mistook enthusiasm for piety, and alienation from the world for the love of God; they could not fail, very soon, to become little better than retreats for discontent and indolence, or rather seminaries of superstition and prejudice. Yet, notwithstanding, they had not unfrequently, within

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their walls, instances of patience and resignation, and of devotion and charity, carried to the highest perfection; and even cultivators of science, who have scarcely been eclipsed.

The persecution of Decius, which fell particularly hard upon Egypt, gave the first occasion to the rise of this perversion of Christianity, which, from small beginnings, extended itself over the whole Christian world. I call it a perversion, because it induced the belief of the paramount merit of bodily austerities, and excluded human beings from the common comforts and enjoyments of life, enjoining celibacy, and placing men in all respects, as far removed as possible from the most innocent commerce with the world. Nothing of this kind was ever prescribed by Christ or the Apostles. Every person is by them supposed to live in society. Celibacy, indeed, is recommended by the Apostle Paul, but only for prudential reasons, as subjecting men to less inconveniencies, in time of difficulty and persecution. The state of marriage is always spoken of in the Scripture as honourable.

The first hermits were men who had been driven by persecution to a distance from cities; and being obliged to conceal themselves in desert

sert places; far from human society, but being able to subsist, either from the natural fruits of the earth, their own labour, or the charity of others, they by degrees acquired a fondness for it; and their satisfaction was augmented by the respect that was paid them on account of their great sanctity, as men who had abandoned the world, and all the enjoyments of it, for the sake of religion: so that they were considered in the same light as martyrs and confessors; and such, some of them really were.

The same idea of sanctity became by degrees transferred to those who had chosen the society of these original hermits; who relieved their wants in their rigid mode of life; and who ultimately were induced to adopt the same regimen themselves. Every thing which tended to reconcile the soul to its material tabernacle, such as sensual indulgences of all kinds, even those which had always been deemed inoffensive, was to be carefully avoided. Whatever tended to mortify the body, on the contrary, was conceived to be for the advantage of the soul; and the state nearest to this ideal perfection was thought to be that in which life could be supported with the fewest enjoyments, or corporeal gratifications. In all this, however, they only followed

the practice of many of their Heathen contemporaries, who, like the present Hindoos, voluntarily submit themselves to the most painful mortifications; and conformed to the doctrine of the Pythagorean and Platonic philosophy, which inculcated the belief, that by force of contemplation, the soul could be, in a great measure, detached from the body, and in such manner re-ascend to that state of union with God, which all souls were supposed to have had, before they were separated from that one great source of intelligence, and in which they expected to be absorbed, after undergoing a state of discipline in this lower world.*

When they were at length formed into societies, they established ordinances, fixed a discipline, and bound themselves by positive, yet not, in all respects, similar regulations. But, in some of your Abbey excursions, you must have remarked this in its most striking form. I am not certain, however, that you are informed (and an instance from our own country, will serve our purpose as well as from any other) that our own common English law did not suffer those monastic personages to enjoy the benefits of society, who secluded themselves from it, and refused to submit

• Priestley.

submit to its regulations. This was also a rule in the feudal law, “Desit esse miles seculi, qui factus est miles Christi; nec beneficium pertinet ad eum, qui non debet gerere officium.” * A monk was, therefore, accounted *civiliter mortuus*; and when he entered into religion, might, like other dying men, make his testament, and nominate his executors; or if he made none, the ordinary might grant administration to his next kin, as if he were actually dead intestate. And such executors and administrators had the same power, and might bring the same actions for debts due to the religious, and were liable to the same actions for those due from him, as if he were naturally deceased. † Nay, so far has this principle been carried, that, when one was bound in a bond to an Abbot and his successors, and afterwards nominated his executors, and professed himself a monk of the same abbey, and, in process of time, was himself made Abbot thereof, the law gave him, in the capacity of Abbot, an action of debt against *his own executors*, to recover the money due. ‡

We are not, for all this, to treat slightly, much less contemptuously, the early monastic institutions. There are two observations, evidently to be

* Blackstone.

† Littleton.

‡ Coke on Littleton.

be made on them. First, concerning the severity of ecclesiastical penance. This, as I have said before, cannot be deduced from Scripture; and therefore, however extravagant, or however absurd; however opposite to the attributes of a commiserating God, or the feelings of a fallible man, it may be thought; Christ and his Apostles cannot be answerable for it. The other, is that pious liberality, derived from the new commandment of "loving one another," which has been perhaps the peculiar and distinguishing characteristic of Christians, as opposed to every other denomination of men. In the times of the Apostles, and in the first ages of the church, it shewed itself in voluntary contributions for the relief of the poor and the persecuted, the infirm and the unfortunate. As soon as the church was permitted to have permanent possessions in land, and acquired the protection of the civil power, it exerted itself in the erection of hospitals of every kind; institutions of charity and humanity, which were forgotten in the laws of Solon and Lycurgus, and for a single example of which you will, I believe, in vain explore the boasted annals of Pagan Rome.*

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* Bishop Watson.

It has been, notwithstanding, a prevalent, for it has been an easy, and convenient species of wit, to pour general and undistinguishing censure on the monks; and to suppose their foundations to have been the retreats of vice, and of illiterate indolence, at every period of time. But the fact is, that even in England, about the period of the Norman conquest, monasteries were the only seminaries of learning we had. The most eminent scholars which this island produced, both in philosophy and humanity, then, and even afterwards, for centuries, were educated in our religious houses.* And was not the case the same upon the continent?

Recollect, also, how much the destruction of the monasteries in England injured agriculture. Our history proves, that *one-third*, at least, of England was cleared, and brought into cultivation, by the monks, particularly by that most respectable order of them, the Benedictines. The same was also the case in France. The waste and barren soils, that were abandoned to them as of little or no value to the public, they thus brought into luxuriant production. The swampy lands they drained; the over-grown woody ones they cleared away. In short, let le-

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* Monast. Ang.

vity say what it will, these venerable men were not generally consecrated to God, that they might fatten upon idleness. They, on the contrary, built, planted, and cultivated the soil, to the eventual benefit of the community ; at the same time, no doubt, to the immediate comfort of themselves, their fraternities, and the indigent and wretched.

It would not be conformable to good sense, nevertheless, to say, that monastic institutions should at all times have existence, as being at all times equally beneficial. I have long been decidedly of a different opinion ;* and my former judgment becomes daily strengthened by experience. Yet, for a moment, (and candour demands the example) turn your eyes upon Russia. Would it not be injurious, would it not be even madness, to suppress religious houses in that country ; in a country of such prodigious extent, and at present of such little civilization ? Who but monks, who in fact possess the greatest portion of the science of the clergy, can be supposed capable of the task of instructing the Russian peasantry ? Moreover, as I have said above, where there are little more than waste grounds, religious foundations have ever been found advantageous to

* Philosophical Rhapsodies.

to agriculture : where intellectual ignorance prevails, they have never failed to disseminate knowledge and letters ; and where war, and other such exterminating occupations, form the national character, they have always been found successful expounders of the mercies of religion.

In the instances of the more compact governments of Europe, it may, however, I will confess, be beneficial, once for all, to pay the tribute of gratitude for benefits received. Society may at length demand the apparently ungrateful sacrifice of all no longer useful, however venerable piles. The scaffolding is always, we know, removed, and the builders paid off, when the mansion is completely finished. But why wantonly degrade, where we should rather confer present comforts and honour, and even, if possible, posthumous reputation ? It is not the purest example on record which men follow, when they make the depraved and insatiably wicked Henry VIII. of England their model. But you will tell me, it is not rendering religion unpopular, to oblige her ministers to activity ; contemptible, to compel them to purity ; or unamiable, to divest them of invidious splendour. I grant it. And I will further acquiesce in the principle, that independent and wealthy clerical
3 corporations

corporations are no longer advantageous, after societies have become enlightened. No truth is more clear, than that religious liberty, without limit, disarms every sort of animosity among sects; and that the diffusion of knowledge restrains the extravagancies of fanaticism. This is, I allow, the real *argumentum ad verecundiam*; and no position is, therefore, more clear, than that monastic institutions may often survive the spirit which gave them birth. The soul, the general advantage, which actuated monachism, may be in truth often annihilated, while the skeleton alone remains, unseemly, and precluded from regeneration.

Friend, however, as I am to primitive monastic institutions, it is not incumbent upon me here to dilate in eulogium on the fathers of the church. I leave them then, in course, to the filial protection of their learned and respectable successors. The truth of the scheme of Christianity, and the indisputable benefits which have resulted from it, are the points alone with which I am, in any manner, concerned; and they are such, and of such extreme simplicity, that they require no ponderous erudition, nor any great depth of meditation, to develope. In their genuine form, in which they can scarcely
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be mistaken, they may at once be displayed even to the most ignorant, by referring to the gospel. The immense volumes of fathers and councils, consequently of schoolmen, casuists, and controversialists, may, as they now no longer perplex the world, sink, for me, into the oblivion, which must for ever enshroud them and their laborious fabricators.

It is perfectly useless, in fact, to appeal, at any time, on abstract questions, to the primitive fathers. I would not be disrespectful; but why are the primitive fathers to be looked upon as necessarily infallible in their opinions? Were they, *cæteris paribus*, more enlightened than the enlightened men of the present day? Or, had they less interested motives, to urge them to tenacity in the support of their interpretations? All religious controversies, which can only be defended, therefore, by a reference to the first writers of the Christian church, carry with them, I am apprehensive, a suspicion, *prima facie*, that they are not altogether tenable on the grounds of reason and fair argument. For what, in fact, had the fathers to guide them? Nothing, surely, but tradition and common sense. And have not we the aid of the same lights, strengthened still further by the advantages of improved science,

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and better demonstrated principles? The Old, and the New Testament, are not different now from what they were fifteen hundred years ago.

We are not always, therefore, to rest on the crutch of authority; which would be as much as to say, we are always to be children, and never to walk alone. Hereditary weakness is not necessary to render religion lovely. At the same time, however, that we are not to raise the fathers to the high rank of apostles, or assert that they were assisted by inspiration, or that they were endowed, above the common lot of mankind, with infallibility; we yet are not to refuse them our regard, as witnesses of the opinions of their respective ages; as historians of the facts, which were accessible to their inquiries; and as teachers, whose piety and learning eminently distinguished them from all their contemporaries. Sharing the imperfections of other writers, they may, indeed, fairly claim the same indulgence: and, if the plea of credulity is to be admitted against them as a ground of objection, remember, I beseech you, with what equal, if not superior force, it operates against some of the most celebrated writers of Greece and Rome.

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Divines (they will pardon me for saying it) are not in general, I am afraid, guided by the soundest wisdom, when they urge the authority of the church, as sufficient to supply every want of proof. It is, in reality, very like arguing in a circle, proving the authority of the church by that of the Scriptures, and the authority of the Scriptures by that of the church. The utility of many of the writings of the fathers is somewhat more than disputable; nor, if placed in competition with more modern theologians, even with the very divines themselves of whom I am speaking, can they in any manner be found equal, either in extension of learning, real philosophy, or chaste elucidation of the tenets of Christianity.

I have proved, that Christianity humanized, in many respects, the Romans, and that it even greatly enlightened their conquerors. The ancient Germans, for instance, had no cities. Even in their hamlets or villages, they did not build their houses contiguous.* The Romans built several cities on the banks of the Rhine. But in all the vast extent from that country to the coasts of the Baltic, there was hardly one city previous to the ninth century of the Christian æra.† There were, indeed, a few places which

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* Tacitus.

† Conringius.

might be called towns. Under Charlemagne, and the emperors of his family, as the political state of Germany began to improve, several cities were founded. Charlemagne himself endowed two archbishoprics and nine bishoprics, in certain of the most considerable towns.* The bishops then fixing their residence, cathedrals were built; and, for the facility of religious communication, the people gathered in from the country, and by degrees settled themselves as denizens under the immediate eye of their pastors. The Germans, in this manner, undoubtedly borrowed the institution of civil and municipal associations from the Romans.

Not that we are here, in a single point, to recede from our former opinions relative to the Germans and Scandinavians. On the strong Scythian ground, we are still to stand. We might even go farther, and, if necessary, expose the futility of what is not unfrequently believed, that these our northern heroes had been at first impelled by want, from the sterility of their own countries, and subsequently allured by the reputed fruitfulness of the Italian shores. On the contrary, almost every part of Germany, Hungary, Bohemia, and Gaul, are finer countries than

* Aub. Miræi Opera Diplôm.

than Italy. Lombardy, Romagna, Naples, and a few other parts of the old Roman dominion, are certainly fertile; but they do not excel, if they equal, various divisions of the trans-Alpine world. Poverty and hunger, therefore, did not instigate these sturdy Scythian and Celtic tribes. They rushed on to conquest among the Romans, as the Romans rushed on to conquest among them. Moreover, long before the Romans existed, have we not seen them a people of enterprise and importance? To those who have locally examined even the natural impediments they had to encounter, their perseverance and ability must have been far from equivocal. But to master the Alps and the Apennines, and to sweep all through Italy with large armies, necessary provisions and baggage, while they were opposed by the formidable legions of the Capitol, required, I think it must be allowed, some military knowledge, some regularity of proceeding, and, it may be presumed, some sagacity of counsel. Brennus, on approaching the imperial city, did not speak like a common or an uninformed man. "You do nothing," says he, in speaking to the Romans, "which is uncommon, or politically unjust, in subjugating your restless neighbours, and in getting possession of their territories: you, in so doing, act con-

“formably to the most ancient of all laws, the
“law by which the powerful compel the submission of the weak. My plea is the same, and
“that plea I mean to enforce.”*

Now, let me ask, What was the division of Poland the other day, by the three greatest despotic sovereigns in Europe? Was it as warrantable as the conduct of Brennus? Was it as candidly intrepid? But no matter. These hardy children of the north have been unfairly dealt with by the historians of the Romans. Their own troops, and their own achievements, the Romans display in so bold a manner, and the actions of their opponents, on the other hand, they place in so questionable a light, that we scarcely think of the one, while we contemplate the other with admiration. But why blush to record an adversary's merit? The Romans were but men; and these men met with men as firm and as determined as themselves. If an unbiased inquirer were called upon to fix the period in the history of the world, during which the condition of the human race in Europe was the most calamitous and afflicted, he would probably, without much hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Theodosius the Great

to

• Plutarch.

to the establishment of the Lombards in Italy. The contemporary authors, who beheld that scene of desolation, are at a loss even for expressions to describe its horrors. "The scourges of God, the destroyers of nations," are the dreadful epithets by which they distinguish the most noted of the northern leaders.*

I have no wish to palliate atrocity. On the contrary, I would, had I it in my power, devote it to eternal infamy. But with what face can we moderns, let me here be permitted to ask, fix upon these people the opprobrious character of ferocious barbarians for ravaging and destroying countries, while we cannot but recollect, that one of the most polished nations upon earth, the French, under the refined and splendid reign of Louis XIV. and under the command, too, of the great Turenne, converted the most fertile and populous provinces of Germany into desarts. Fix your eyes on Heidelberg; and thence mark the extent of the devastation caused in the Palatinate. From the Neckar and the Rhine to the Moselle, sixty flourishing cities were reduced to ashes in one campaign, and the richest country in Germany was made a waste. Even so late as the year 1756, instructions of a like dreadful im-

P 3.

port

* Robertson.

port were given by Marechal Belle-Isle to the Marechal Contades, which Prince Ferdinand, fortunately getting possession of, commented upon as they deserved, and published. How then are we, consistently, to brand a brave people with every thing base and horrible, because, in the prosecution of their wars, individuals may have been cruel, or sovereigns and ministers may have been wicked ?

But this, you will say, is foreign to our subject. I grant it. To proceed, then. Towards the close of the sixth century, Europe appears to have almost completely shaken off the Romans. The Saxons were, by that time, masters of the southern and most fertile provinces of Britain; the Franks were in possession of Gaul; the Hunns of Pannonia; the Goths of Spain; the Lombards of Italy. Scarce any vestige of the Roman policy, jurisprudence, arts, or literature remained.* And thence was to arise commerce, which afterwards tended so materially to polish the manners of the nations of Europe; and to conduct them to order, equity, laws, and humanity; at the same time that this intercourse, immediately subsequent to the settlement of the northern conquerors in the

* Robertson.

the empire, was considerably obstructed ; and continued so to be, even during several centuries.

Navigation, indeed, could not but have been dangerous in seas infested by pirates. Nor could strangers trust to a friendly reception in the ports of uncivilized nations. Even between different parts of the same kingdom, the communications were rare and difficult. The lawless rapine of banditti, together with the avowed exactions of the nobles, rendered a journey of any length, a perilous enterprize. The Italians, however, revived the spirit of commerce. The crusades, by leading multitudes from every corner of Europe into Asia, opened a more direct channel of intercourse between the east and the west ; and this subsisted for two centuries : an effect, however bigotted and disastrous in its cause, both beneficial and permanent in its effects.

During the crusades, the great cities of Italy, and of other countries of Europe, acquired liberty. Soon after the termination of the holy war, the mariner's compass was invented. The ignorance, however, of the middle ages, with respect to the situation and geography of remote countries, was astonishing. The most ancient

geographical chart, which now remains as a monument of the state of that science in Europe, is found in a manuscript, entitled *La Chronique de St. Dennis*. There, the three parts of the earth, then known, are so represented, that Jerusalem is placed in the middle of the globe; and Alexandria appears to be as close to it as Nazareth.*

Yet, it was during these days, that civilization began to rear her head. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the commerce of Europe was almost entirely in the hands of the Italians, more commonly known in those ages by the name of Lombards. Companies of these Lombards settled in the capitals and great towns of almost every kingdom of Europe. The operation of the ancient barbarous laws concerning strangers, was suspended with respect to them. They became the merchants, the manufacturers, the bankers, and carriers of all Europe. This spirit found its way rapidly to the north. In the thirteenth century, it was in its fullest vigour. Lubeck and Hamburgh then set on foot the Hanseatic league for commercial defence. The advantages which resulted from it, you well know. The Lombards and Hanseatic mer-
chants

* Mem. de l'Acad. de Bellés Lettres.

chants aided each other : they were embarked in the same bottom ; and their cause was a common one.

In more early times, the superior lord of any territory, in which a foreigner settled, might seize his person, and reduce him even to servitude. If a person removed only from one province of a kingdom to another, he was bound, within a year and a day, to acknowledge himself the vassal of the lord on whose estate he settled. Remarkably striking instances of this occur in the histories of the middle ages. The cruel depredations of the Normans, in the ninth century, for example, made many of the inhabitants of the maritime provinces of France, fly into the interior parts of the kingdom. But there, instead of being received with that humanity, to which their wretched condition entitled them, they were immediately reduced, and given over to a state of servitude.*

But admitting all this, I may be asked, whence the radical source of the dissensions among Christians ; the religious hatred, and finally, the bloody persecutions? They originated, I reply, and as I have already said, in the ambitious designs, and

and fluctuating, interested opinions of laics, as well as churchmen. The spirit of intolerance and persecution was not, indeed, merely in proportion to the opposition it had to encounter, but to the magnitude and enormity of its own absurdities. The cruelties, therefore, of many of the professors, not practisers of gospel charity, have, it must be confessed, left a stain on the character of Christianity, which no time can efface, nor scarcely any sacrifice expiate.

“It is rating our own opinions very high,” says Montaigne, “to direct another to be roasted alive for not embracing them.” Yet many nations have been depopulated by such a phrenzy. The divisions and schisms in the Christian church, for instance, began very early. Even the Apostles, Peter and Paul, had differences of opinion about the observance of the Mosaic rites.* Paul and Barnabas separated.† In the church of Corinth there arose an alarming dispute, one being for Paul, another for Apollos, and others for Cephas. Some of the epistles were purposely written to preserve the members of the same church, from what St. Paul calls doubtful disputations.‡ In short, these unbecoming animosities took rise very early, broke out

* Epist. to the Galatians.

† Acts.

‡ Romans.

out very frequently; and were not without much difficulty healed at length by apostolic authority. But when the Apostles were no more; when their superintendency had been withdrawn from the ungovernable and untoward; then the pride and obstinacy of individuals were not at all times to be restrained, much less to be at any time wholly subdued.

Nothing it should seem, for instance, could be more idle, than a contention about the proper time of celebrating our Saviour's crucifixion. Yet this dispute, not important in itself, as there is no command in the sacred writings to keep the festival at all, was carried on with all the extravagance of party rancour, even to the shedding of blood.* Even Constantine was induced to publish insulting and angry edicts against those, who would not embrace certain supposed articles of the Christian faith; to forbid their meeting in assemblies; and to confiscate their public property to the use of the revenue, or of the more orthodox church. In short, the project of exterminating odious heresies was vigorously prosecuted by this the first Christian emperor, many of whose penal regulations were copied even from the edicts of the
Heathen

* Bingham's Antiquities.

Heathen persecutor, Dioclesian, and this too with the approbation of those who had felt their oppression, and had loudly complained of their injustice.* It appears, also, that the zeal of Constantine led him, most disastrously, to an implacable enmity to the Jews. †

The sons of Constantine again went still greater lengths in the abolition of the freedom of religious opinion. The pretences for rapine and oppression were, under them, multiplied. Every indulgence was shewn to the violent and illegal behaviour of those of their own way of thinking; every doubt was explained to the disadvantage of the opposite sects; simple deviations were made capital crimes; and the demolition of the temples of heresy was celebrated, as one of the auspicious events of the reign of Constans and Constantius. ‡ The synod of Antioch, in the like spirit, was convened by Constantius, by whose order, the word consubstantial was omitted, and all the consubstantialists were driven from their churches and cities. The ecclesiastical history, in short, of this æra, is nothing but a series of councils and creeds, differing from each other;
of

* Letters on Intolerance. † Spelman's Councils,

‡ Gibbon.

of bishops deposing, censuring, and anathematizing their adversaries; and of such reciprocal cruelties, when either party was invested with power, as made the philosophic Julian say of them, that "Beasts were not so cruel to men, as the generality of Christians were to each other."* And this was, perhaps, but too literally the case; for Gregory Nazianzen emphatically laments, "that the kingdom of heaven was converted by discord into an image of chaos, a nocturnal tempest, a hell itself."†

The Christian bishops and people, disarmed at once, however, of power by Julian, the restorer of Paganism, were turbulent and seditious (nor was it much to be wondered at) during his administration. But his prudence, we are told, at last brought them into tolerable order. In the commencement of his reign, indeed, he published an edict, by which he extended to all the inhabitants of the Roman world, the benefits of a free and equal toleration. He even caused the Christian disputants to come into his presence, and personally assured them, that every one should exercise his religion, without molestation, provided he did not disturb the public peace by his divisions. The bishops and ecclesiastics,

* Ammianus.

† Orat. i. Tillemont.

siastics, however, we are given to understand, were ungovernable; insomuch, that in spite of itself, they did at last irritate the emperor's spirit, and awaken his resentment.* The consequence was, that he deprived them of all the immunities, honours, and revenues granted to them by Constantine; that he abrogated the laws, made in their favour; that he ordered them to be enlisted as soldiers; that he even went so far as to issue an edict, that no Christian should bear any office in the army, nor have any concern in the distribution or management of the public revenues; that he prohibited the instruction of the children of Christians in the Grecian language and learning;† and that he would have proceeded to still farther extremities with them, had he returned victorious from the Persian expedition. ‡

In one of the intolerant edicts of this, nevertheless, very much admired and philosophic emperor, he announces, in the genuine spirit of persecution, that "frantic patients, such as the Christians, were only to be cured by salutary violence." Yet with all his efforts, he could not extinguish the religion of Christ. With the enthusiasm

* Gibbon.

† Socrates iii.

‡ Theodoret, lib. iii. cap. 21.

enthusiasm of an enraged bigot, he was seen to stretch over them the utmost extent of his unbounded prerogative. But still the fanatics, or, as he called them, the Galileans, who were contemptible to men, and odious to the gods, were not to be driven from their persuasion: nor was the divinity of truth to be eradicated by the power of the most formidable potentate then upon earth. Jovian, his successor, indeed, took the opposite line. He restored Christianity; for he hated contention, he said, "and loved only those who studied peace." *

It would be endless, were we any farther to plunge into this ecclesiastical labyrinth. It is an unfathomable gulph, filled with absurdities, and abounding in contradiction. Nay, the ignorance, (and why should it be concealed?)—the credulity, or dishonesty of Christians, in the fourth and fifth centuries, are evident, in innumerable instances, and particularly in this circumstance, that writers of those ages have attested miracles, which they either knew to be false, or did not know to be true.† These were employed, for example, to serve the cause of the consubstantialists, and to depress the Arians; and subsequently, when Nestorianism, and Pelagianism,

* Themistius.

† Jortin's Remarks

lagianism, reared their heads, and declared for the mastery ; they were afterwards called in to assist in establishing the adoration of saints, and relics ; and to recommend the monastic life, as above all others the most holy, and the most acceptable to heaven.

The blindness, and the easiness of belief of these times were, it is not to be denied, so great, that miracles and portents, collected even out of Ovid and Livy, and other Pagan poets and historians, were accommodated with facility to the Christian monks and saints. “Nor would mankind now,” says Dr. Jortin, “be fearful of rejecting these counterfeited miracles, if they only considered how soon the notion gained admittance, that it was lawful and even meritorious, to advance falsehoods on behalf of a favourite religious principle. Maximus, thus the murderer of his prince, and an usurper, was an angel, when he declared himself for orthodoxy and Ambrose ; but when he was conquered by Theodosius, Ambrose observed, that God had abandoned him, because he had protected the Jews.”

One thing, however, is here very remarkable. The Vandals, excepting in the reign of Hun-
neric,

neric, who was exasperated by the refusal of Zeno, the Greek emperor, to concur in a cessation of persecution ; and the Goths at all times abstained from forcing the consciences of their subjects. The mischiefs, however, among others, which arose from what can now only be considered as a subject of ridicule, the pictures, images, and statues of martyrs, saints, and angels, and their occasional disgrace and downfall, are not to be enumerated. Pope Gregory II. as one instance, in the close of a letter to the Emperor Leo, in which he asserts the perpetual use of images from the apostolic age, and their venerable presence in the six synods of the Catholic church, has these words : “ Abandon your rash and fatal enterprize ; reflect, tremble, and repent. If you persist, we are innocent of the blood, that will be spilt in the contest. May it fall on your own head.” Leo’s son, and successor, inherited, if possible, more than his father’s zeal against the worship of images, and called a council at Constantinople, to extirpate the abomination altogether. The bishops met, to the number of three hundred and thirty-eight, and after considering the doctrines of Scripture, and the opinions of the fathers, and closely deliberating for the space of six months, at length ultimately decreed, “ That every image, of whatsoever ma-

terials made, and formed by an artist, should be cast out of the Christian church, as a strange and abominable thing:" adding an anathema upon all such as should make images or pictures, or representations of God, or of Christ, or of the Virgin Mary, or of any of the saints; condemning the whole, as a vain and diabolical invention; and deposing all bishops, and subjecting to rigorous penalties all monks and orders of men, who should set up any sacred images in public or private.

The bishop of Rome, however, saw things in a different point of view. He, in opposition, assembled another council in the Lateran church at Rome, where he abrogated all these decrees, and even deposed all who had been ordained bishops by the impious emperors of Constantinople. He directed the immediate and unconditional restoration of statues and images, and anathematized the execrable and pernicious synod of his adversaries; and among others, fulminated this notable example of infallible reasoning; "That if it were lawful for emperors, and those who had deserved well of the commonwealth, to have their images erected, but not lawful to set up those of God, the condition

condition of the immortal God, would be worse than that of men." Almost the whole earth, in a word, saw five succeeding reigns distracted by the violent contentions of the worshippers and the breakers of images.

LETTER XCVIII.

SOON after the civil wars between Cæsar and Pompey, the Haruspices ordered the temple of Isis and Osiris to be demolished ; but after the death of Cæsar, it was restored at the public expence. When Augustus was in Egypt, although he revered the tutelary deity of Alexandria, yet within the Pomærium of Rome, and a mile round it, he prohibited any temple to be erected to Serapis, a god of Pontus, who had usurped the place and worship of Osiris, and who was, therefore, with the utmost difficulty, introduced by the first of the Ptolemies into his newly acquired kingdom. * And this continued a fashionable worship, † during the reign of Augustus, and until Tiberius was induced to repress it by some acts of severity. ‡

This might be allowed, you will say, among the Romans and the Egyptians ; where it was
easier

• Dion.

† Ovid.

‡ Tacitus.

easier, according to Petronius, to find a god than a man; and among all such other nations, as were denominated idolaters by the Christians. But, would not such instability be a foul blot in the followers of a pure and simple religion? It unquestionably would; and it unquestionably was: for in the long period of twelve hundred years, which elapsed between the reign of Constantine and the reformation of Luther, the worship of saints and reliëts, corrupted, universally, the chaste theism of the gospel. The sublime theology of the primitive Christians was gradually corrupted; and the monarchy of Heaven, already clouded by metaphysical subtleties, was degraded by the introduction of a popular mythology, which tended to restore the reign of Polytheism.* Some even of the most respectable bishops had persuaded themselves, that the ignorant rustics would more chearfully renounce the superstitions of Paganism, if they found some resemblance of them in the worship of Christianity. †

The statues, or household Gods of the Romans, were originally *Teraphim*, after the eastern model: they were supposed to protect the possessors from all approaches of harm, through the

* Hume.

† Gibbon.

the power of some demon, genius, or invisible agent, but their favour to cease with the actual possession. * Many, or most of these, were the images of ancestors, whose souls continued, after death, to watch over the fortunes of their descendants, and to be gracious to those who revered them, and trusted to their protection. The Platonists held, that the souls of men were demons; which, after death, became *Lares*, if good; *Lemures*, or *Larvæ*, which literally signifies masks, generally monstrous and uncouth, if bad; and *Manes*, while it was doubtful whether they were to be ranked with the good or bad. † They have been compared by Plutarch to wrestlers and champions, who having finished their career, continue to encourage, and to enable their pupils, by their admonition, to arrive at honours and distinction. They were considered as useful to drive away evil spirits, who roamed about seeking to do mischief; the spirits of those men, who, having led a life of wickedness, were restless after death, and were doomed, in order to expiate their offences, to haunt the earth during a certain time allotted for their atonement, and to terrify mankind, especially the profligate, with their apparitions and noises. ‡

The

* President de Brosse.

† St. Austin.

‡ Memoires de l'Acad. de Scien.

The Lares, indeed, were gods of inferior power at Rome, who presided merely over families and houses. They were two in number, sons of Mercury and Lara. "Quos Græci δαίμονας appellant, nostri, opinor, Lares."* In process of time, however, their power was extended not only over houses, but also over the country and the sea, and we find Lares *Urbani*, to preside over the cities; *Familiares*, over houses; *Rustici* over the country; *Compitales*, over cross-ways; *Marini*, over the sea; *Viales*, over the roads, &c. The statues of the Lares, resembling monkeys, and covered with a skin of a dog, were placed in a niche behind the doors of the houses, or around the hearths. At the feet of the Lares was the figure of a dog barking, to intimate their care and vigilance. Incense was burnt on their altars, and a sow was also offered on particular days. Their festivals were observed at Rome in the month of May, when their statues were crowned with garlands of flowers; and offerings of fruit were presented. The word Lares, seems to be derived from the Etruscan word Lars (originally, indeed, eastern) which signifies conductor, or leader.†

Q4

In

* Cicero.

† Bibliotheca Classica.

In the month of February, a festival, in honour of the dead, was observed at Rome. It continued for twenty-one days; during which time, presents were carried to the graves of the deceased; marriages were forbidden, and the temples of the Gods were shut. It was universally believed, that the manes of their departed friends came and hovered over their graves, and feasted upon the provisions, which the hand of piety and affection had procured for them. Their punishments in hell were also suspended; and during that time, they enjoyed rest and tranquility. What consecrated statues therefore descended to a Roman, he carefully kept as an invaluable inheritance. Others were added, by a man's free choice; as when Nerva put among his *Cubiculares*, an Augustus. The emperors, invariably, indeed, put themselves under the protection of Fortune, having always in their bed-chambers a golden statue of that goddess. When Antoninus Pius was on his death-bed, he ordered the sacred statue to be removed to the apartment of Marcus Aurelius, his adopted son, and successor to the empire. Cicero, whose favourite household divinity was Minerva, when ordered into banishment, first placed the statue of the goddess in the capitol. The Emperor Nero had among his household Gods, the statue of a
4 boy,

boy, to which he sacrificed three times a-day; L. Vitellius, father of the emperor, had among his Lares, golden figures of Pallas and Narcissus; very different, indeed, but consonant, says, Suetonius, to the temper of one, who respected no princes who were not *optimos et electos*; nor any man, who had not *animam sanctiorem*. The Emperor Alexander Severus had, in his private Oratory, the figures of Orpheus, Abraham, Apollonius, and Christ; and in a second chapel, had the images of Cicero and Virgil. *

The *Penates* were also certain inferior deities, who presided over houses and the domestic affairs of families. They were called *Penates*, because they were generally placed in the innermost, and most secret parts of the house; "In penitissimâ ædium parte, quod penitus insidunt." † The place where they stood, was afterwards called *Penetralia*, and they themselves received the name of *Penetrals*. It was in the option of every master of a family to chuse his *Penates*; and therefore Jupiter, and some of the superior gods, are often invoked as patrons of domestic affairs. According to some, however, the Gods were divided into four classes; the first comprehends all the celestial; the second, the sea gods; the third,

* Lampridius.

† Cicero.

third, the gods of hell ; and the last of all, such heroes as had received divine honours after death.

The Penates were originally the manes of the dead ; but, when superstition had taught mankind to pay uncommon reverence to the statues and images of their deceased friends, this attention was soon exchanged for regular worship, and they were admitted by their votaries to share immortality and power over the world, with a Jupiter, or a Minerva, or any other *majorum gentium*. The statues of the Penates were generally made of wax, ivory, gold, silver, bronze, or earth, according to the affluence of the worshipper, and the only offerings they received, were wine, incense, fruits, and sometimes the sacrifices of lambs, sheep, goats, &c. In the early ages of Rome, human sacrifices were offered to them ; but Brutus, who expelled the Tarquins, abolished this abominable custom. When offerings were made to them, their statues were crowned with garlands of poppies, or garlic ; and besides the monthly day that was set apart for their worship, their festivals were celebrated during the Saturnalia. Some have confounded the Lares and the Penates, but they were in reality different. *

The

Dion. Halicar.

The *Genii* were inferior to the gods of the country. In their number we ought to place the *Deæ Matres*, called in inscriptions, *Matres*, *Heræ*, *Dominæ*, who were both able and willing to load their votaries with benefits ; to procure for them happiness, health, and long life, as emblematically represented by the cornucopia, the serpent, and the lotus : and for such protection, it was held a duty to invoke them with prayers, and to honour them with sacrifices. The dog-skin was the distinctive mark of good *genii* ; as the wolf-skin was the covering and emblem of those, who were considered as evil *genii*.

The *Nymphæ* were generally divided into two classes, nymphs of the land, and nymphs of the sea. Of the nymphs of the land, some presided over woods, and were called *Dryades*, and *Hamadryades* ; others presided over mountains, and were called *Oreades* ; some presided over hills and dales, and were called *Napææ*, &c. Of the sea nymphs, some were called *Oceanides*, *Nereides*, *Naiades*, *Potamides*, &c. These presided not only over the sea, but also over rivers, fountains, streams, and lakes. The nymphs fixed their residence, not only in the sea, but also on mountains and rocks, in woods and caverns ;

verns ; and their grottoes were beautified by evergreens, and delightful and romantic scenery. These nymphs were worshipped by the ancients, though not with so much solemnity as the superior deities. They had no temples raised to their honour, and the only offerings they received, were milk, honey, oil, and sometimes the sacrifice of a goat. They were generally represented as young and lively virgins, clothed up to the waist. They sometimes held a vase, from which they seemed to pour water ; sometimes they had grass, leaves, and shells, instead of vases.* It was deemed unfortunate to see them naked ; and such sight was generally attended by an immediate delirium ; to which Propertius seems to allude in a verse, wherein he speaks of the innocence and simplicity of the primitive ages of the world ; *nec fuerat nudas pœnas videre deas*. The nymphs were commonly distinguished by an epithet, which denoted the place of their residence : thus, the nymphs of Sicily were called Sicilides ; those of Corycus, Corycides, &c. †

Manes, as I have said, was a name generally applied by the ancients to the souls, when separated from the bodies. They were reckoned among the infernal deities, and generally supposed to preside over the burying places, and the monuments

* Ovid.

† Homer. Od.

monuments of the dead. They were worshipped with great solemnity, particularly by the Romans. The Augurs always invoked them, when they proceeded to exercise their sacerdotal offices. Virgil introduces his hero as sacrificing to the infernal deities, and to the Manes. The word Manes, indeed, is supposed to be derived from Mania, who was by some reckoned the mother of these tremendous deities. Others derive it from "Manare, quod per omnia ætherea terrænaque manabant;" because they filled the air, particularly in the night, and were intent to molest and disturb the peace of mankind. Some derive Manes, from Manis, an old Latin word, which signifies good or propitious. The word Manes, in short, is used in different senses: sometimes it is taken for the infernal regions; sometimes it is applied to the deities of Pluto's kingdom; whence the epitaphs of the Romans were always superscribed with D. M. *Dis Manibus*, to remind the sacrilegious and profane, not to molest the monuments of the dead, which were guarded with such sanctity.*

But the bronze figures, placed in a Roman bed-chamber, and of which you have seen such large collections, were not probably all consecrated,

erated. Some were kept for ornament ; and some for use. One was valued for the design and workmanship ; another respected for the name it bore, and the like. Such, then, although not consecrated, were kept as much for decoration, as for edification or example. A small part, indeed, might be used as private oracles, to be consulted by a people so extremely attached to divination. To such a one, Plautus has alluded in a prologue, where the household god declares, he had discovered a hidden treasure to the child, which he had refused to make known to the father.*

Most of the consecrated statues, thus, answered a double purpose, being both objects of supplication, and charms to drive away infernal spirits. And it is exactly upon the same principle, and in the same manner, that the figures of saints and martyrs are employed by the bigotted of the Romish communion at this day. The theurgy, or sacred magic, of papal superstition, is in no degree better, if it be even as respectable as that of the Pagan magic of the imperial city. For spells, or the theurgy derived from good spirits, and heavenly powers, are not considered as culpably offensive ; and necromancy,

* *Memoires de l'Acad.*

mancy; or a magic effected by the ministry of evil spirits and poisonous drugs, and practised for bad purposes, is the only religious rite abhorred and punished.*

Among the ancients, as we have seen, the First Cause was represented under various figurative attributes. A veil of allegory, constantly concealed from the multitude the real meaning of the institutors. And thus long habit never fails to confirm and reconcile absurdity. The brute substance was adored; while the mind, which it was intended to personify, was disregarded. Images thus became gods; and inanimate blocks the supposed active essences of divinity.

But, in fact, is the case much mended? Does the Madona of Loretto differ very much from the Venus of Medicis? Or does the Saviour of mankind on the cross, and I trust you will pardon me for hazarding the comparison, receive less idolatrous homage, than the thunderer of Olympus, or the Apollo of Belvidere? Tell me, can any man, without being affected, see the foot of the old statue of St. Peter, or more properly of Jupiter Capitolinus, stuck out in the superb
ile

* Letters on Intolerance.

ile of the most magnificent church in the world, and piously kissed, wept upon, and groaned under, by popes, cardinals, bishops, and the whole flock of the congregation of the Vatican? Ignorance may plead for the lower orders of the people; but, what shall be said for a Pius VI. an elegant, an informed, and a manly pontiff, and at the close of the eighteenth century, who, forgetful of his dignity even as a rational being, shall devoutly, and with down cast eyes, approach that wretched bit of bronze, modernly baptized St. Peter, bow to it, pray to it, ardently hug it, place its toe on his head, hold it to his heart, &c.?

It is scarcely to be credited: one might, with equal propriety, have looked for the adoration of Pasquin, or Marforio. But, devotion, when it does not lie under the check of reason, is too apt to degenerate into enthusiasm. And as enthusiasm is an excess in devotion, so is superstition an excess, not only of devotion, but of religion in general; according, to borrow the observation of an ancient Heathen, *Religentem esse oportet, religiosum nefas*:* a man should be religious, not superstitious. Enthusiasm has something in it, if I may say so, of madness; and
superstition,

* Aulus Gellius.

superstition, of folly. If an absurd dress or behaviour, indeed, to recur to a familiar example, be introduced in the world, it will soon be found out and discarded. But, on the contrary, a habit, or ceremony, though preposterously ridiculous, which has taken sanctuary in the church, will stick in it for ever. Thus an early bishop, perhaps, thought it proper to repeat a certain form, in a particular kind of shoes or slippers; another fancied, it would be very decent, if such a part of public devotions were performed with a mitre on his head and a crosier in his hand: to this another added an extravagant garb, which, he conceived, would allude very aptly to such and such mysteries; till by degrees, the whole office degenerated into empty and lamentable pageantry.*

In St. Peter's, you have, I am sure, often seen the pope, for hours together, busied in scarcely any thing else than putting on or off his different accoutrements, according to the different parts he had to act. Nay, you must have even seen his infallibility, in this respect, so thoroughly deranged, as to have stood in need of direct, and reiterated prompting. But recollect, I beseech you, the small aperture in the altar of that

VOL. VI. R church,

* Addison.

church, in Rome, which formerly belonged to the Jesuits, and in which petitioners put letters, addressed to the saint of the spot, for his gracious intercession with God in their behalf. What a happy contrivance, for mental inquisitors, to acquire ready intelligence of the wants and the secrets of individuals ! Did the priest of the Oracle of Delphos ever more glaringly, or more impudently, impose on the credulous herd, which they allured to the shrine of idolatrous inspiration ? Nor can you have forgotten the infantine image of our Saviour, called *Bambino*, which is carried to the houses of the sick, who can afford a carriage for its transportation ; for it would be beneath its dignity, to be carried to any one on foot.

This is really revolting, in an age so enlightened as the present, and when most of the Roman Catholics themselves are sorely grieved, at such scandalous and interested deviations from the purity of their faith. The ancients, they know, only saw with the eye ; while *they* are peculiarly instructed to look with the intellect. Educated as they are in the superstition of their country, we are not, I am ready to acknowledge, to judge harshly of their prejudices, nor to condemn, as unpardonable, what long and sanctified custom

has rendered, I might almost say, a part of themselves. What would dissolve them into tears, is by us coolly investigated. What to them is simple, is to us inexplicable. What speaks to their passions, addresses our understandings. That precept comes directly levelled at their hearts, which with us only affects the head. They at once melt into rapture ; while we, after tracing the meaning of what is hidden and obscure, feel scarcely any other emotion than that of wonder.

He does the best service to truth, in my opinion, who endeavours to hinder it from being supported by falsehood. As Christianity is a religion established on a divine rock, it cannot but be proof against the most searching torrents of human enquiry. Why, therefore, should we have that timid zeal, which some of its advocates betray, who express an extreme anxiety to preserve even the loose sands, weeds, and heterogeneous substances, which the waves of error and imposition have accumulated on its sides ; as if these could at all add to its stability, or the removal of them weaken its foundation ?

Even the faulty superstitions of the church may serve to confirm the purity of Christianity.

They furnish an additional evidence of its truth and importance. For it is a real satisfaction, though, at the first aspect, of a melancholy kind, to trace the progress of those superstitions, and those corruptions in doctrine and discipline, by which Christianity has been so much debased, and the natural influence of it diminished; now that by the force of its own principles it has, in a great measure, recovered itself from the deplorable state into which it had sunk.* It has not, in reality, been for religion, but for superstition, that mankind have in general been wrangling. Some, for instance, will not sit; others will not kneel: some are for the religion of cloaks and grey coats; and others for the religion of gowns, cassocks, and surplices; some are for the religion of extempore prayer, and others for the religion of a ritual.

The doctrine of transubstantiation, in this manner, had its origin in a council held to decide on the adoration of images.† The council of Constantinople, in 750, decided the bread and wine to be merely representative. The council of Nice, in 780, decided, “that after consecration, the sacramental bread and wine were not the representation or antitype of the body and blood of

* Priestley.

† Bayle.

of Christ, but were *really* his body and blood." In 818, it was taught that the figure or appearance only of bread and wine remained, and that the true body of Christ was present.* Joannes Scotus spoke with still more clearness and precision, for he said, "the bread and wine were images of the *absent* body and blood of Christ." But Innocent III. took away this simplicity of explanation: in the council of Lateran, 1215, the same council which decreed, that no body could be saved out of the Catholic church, he pronounced, "that the bread was really transubstantiated into the body of our Saviour; still leaving a quality belonging to bread, *paneitas*; and a quality belonging to wine, *vineitas*, capable of abating hunger and thirst."

We read, in Cicero †, that though the human race had indulged themselves in the wildest superstitions, they yet had never arrived at that last pitch of extravagance, the eating of their gods. It was the remark of Averroës, the famous Arabian philosopher; "That religion is surely, of all others, the most absurd and contemptible, in which its votaries first create their god, and afterwards eat him." It was reserved, however, to the ninth century of

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* Paschasius Rudbertus.

† De Nat. Deorum.

the Christian æra, to introduce this strange and unequalled contradiction; and to the schools, in process of time, to dispute, whether the body of Jesus Christ be absolutely and actually clothed or naked, in the Eucharist.*

It may be said, these are mad extravagancies; and that the most learned divines and philosophers have been uniformly against them. I do not deny it. But of this I am certain, that although no one convincing argument can be stumbled upon in their support, yet, that an hundred thousand quotations can instantly be produced for their validity. Truth is, I know, in its own nature, prior to all authority; and that without it, no authority can be proved. And hence the reason why our Saviour and his Apostles always appealed to the understandings of men, for the truth of their doctrines. But the Scriptures, you may say, are to be adduced, to warrant the interpretation of the Eucharist: even the express words of the gospel itself are decidedly in its favour; and therefore, whatever be the difficulties, that the doctrine of transubstantiation must be received. In like manner, you might as well tell me, that, in the early ages of Christianity, some heretics being shocked at the

* *Histoire Critique.*

the idea of Christ, the Son of God, suffering on the cross, declared the crucifixion to have been nothing else than a phantom, which imposed upon the senses of the beholders ; and that with this interpretation, many of the multitude were satisfied. But from such latitude of exposition, I hope, it will not be deemed impertinent in me to dissent.

I cannot think every particular expression, word, and letter, in the New Testament, to have been dictated by the Holy Ghost ; or that the Apostles were, in reality, nothing but its amanuenses. To me it is more consonant to reason, that the Almighty should have dealt with them in a manner more conformable to their capacities as human beings ; that he suggested divine thoughts first to their minds, and that he ordinarily left them, to weigh them as they did other truths, and to put them into such expressions as their fancies, or judgments, were naturally inclined to use. And it is farther, in my opinion, evident, that the Apostles, like the prophets, must have had some share in the expression at least ; for otherwise no solution can be given of the different styles of these sacred writers, which varied according to their tempers and education.

If the Holy Ghost, for instance, had dictated every word, why should Isaiah, who was bred in a court, be more florid and magnificent than Amos, who had his education among herdsmen? Why should St. Luke, who had a polite education, write his gospel in better Greek, and more agreeable to the Greek and Latin histories, than St. John? Or why should St. Paul, who was brought up among Rabbies, discover more of Jewish learning, and rabbinical reasoning, than the other Apostles?

The Roman Catholics, moreover, on the subject of the Eucharist, are not aware, that while they insist upon transubstantiation, contrary to the evidence of their senses, they destroy one of the principal defences of orthodox Christianity, the very evidence of miracles. For men, being exhorted to believe that the bread and wine which they see, touch, and taste, are the real body and blood of Christ, may as reasonably suppose, that the healing of the sick, and the raising of the dead, were all delusions; and that there is nothing to be known by the senses only, of which they can be morally sure.* Yet such have been the doctrines, for which so many

* Archbishop Tillotson.

many lives have been sacrificed: such have been the authorities of a church, which would not only subdue the importunity and arrogance of human reason, but, at the same time, would make even our senses captives to hierarchical infallibility.

The interested of the Roman Catholic church, indeed, were at all times much inclined to favour the opinion of the real presence, as it attributed to themselves a miraculous power. And the people, who believed they participated of the very body and blood of their Saviour, were loth to renounce so extraordinary, and, as they imagined, so salutary a privilege.* Still, however, even all these advantages and prerogatives were not sufficient. Under the papacy of Innocent III. who had established transubstantiation, arose the tremendous inquisition. To put a stop to the increasing progress of heresies, and more effectually to extinguish them, he founded the orders of Dominicans and Franciscans. Dominic and his followers he sent into the province of Languedoc, and particularly to Toulouse. Francis, and his disciples, he directed to preach and to persecute in Italy. Dominic preached

* Hume.

preached a crusade against the unfortunate Albigenses, and promised a plenary remission of sins to all who took on them the cross, for their extirpation. The miseries that ensued, you are, however, too well acquainted with, to need any detail from me; as you are, likewise, with the blessings that flowed from that divine and truly Christian spirit, which for ever put a stop to their further iniquitous progress in France.*

The Cardinal de Ribera, in his Memorial to Philip III. of Spain, for the expulsion of the Morecoes, referred to the holy writ. He argued, there was no precept so often repeated to the chosen people of God, as that of rooting out from among them idolatrous nations; and as the faithful in Spain were in danger from the infection of the Arabic example, the extirpation of these infidels was, in his opinion, as incumbent on the king of Spain, as that of the Heathens on the kings and judges of the Jews.† And yet these very Arabian conquerors of Spain had introduced into that kingdom an hospitality, generosity, and refinement, unknown before in the west. The court of Cordova was acknowledged

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* Philosophical Rhapsodies.

† Watson's History.

to be the most elegant and polite in the world. Together with the mechanical, the Saracens had cultivated the liberal arts; and while a noble external appearance was manifested in their buildings, furniture, and dress, their poetry and music, consecrated to heroism and love, displayed generosity and elegance of mind, still more noble and affecting.*

Industry, learning, and all the fine arts, as I have frequently observed to you, flourished under the Kaliphat, while they were nearly extinguished in Europe. What is still more surprising, the Christians of Spain were comparatively barbarians; while in the same country the Saracens were a polished people. But the Kaliphat, though the greatest, and perhaps the best civilized empire, that till then had ever existed, was doomed to a sudden fall. Like the Romans, they had a series of princes, some of them the greatest that ever dignified, and others the worst that ever disgraced, human nature.†

The age of Arabian learning continued about five hundred years, till the great eruption of the Moguls, and was coeval with the darkest and
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* Watson's Continuator.

† Universal History.

most indolent period of European annals; but, since the sun of science has arisen in the west, all oriental studies seem to have languished and declined.* Under the Ommiades, however, or the beginning of the eighth century, the Arabian empire extended two hundred days journey from east to west, from the confines of Tartary and India, to the shores of the Atlantic. They possessed the continent of Africa, the solid and compact dominion from Fargana to Aden, and from Tarsus to Surat.† The progress of the Mahommedan religion diffused over this ample space a general similarity of manners and opinions. The language and laws of the Koran were studied with equal devotion at Samarcand and Seville. The Moor and the Indian embraced, as countrymen and brothers, in the pilgrimage of Mecca; and the Arabian language was adopted, as the popular idiom, in all the provinces to the westward of the Tigris. The greater part, in short, of the temperate, as well as of the torrid zone, was subject to the Mahommedans.

The institution of the Inquisition in Spain, however, of which we have been speaking, was principally

* Gibbon.

† Bibliot. Orient.

principally levelled against these Moors, though it also, in a considerable degree, embraced the never to be forgiven Israelites. A very powerful, and a very brilliant writer, has thought fit to run a parallel between the effects of the Mahomedan and Christian religions on national characters. "The latter," he says, "is marked by a spirit of benevolence and humanity, new in the history of the world, which in opposition to every distinction of language, of manners, and of national interests, has united the various people of which it is composed, in one firm and sacred bond of brotherhood and affection. Whereas, the nations who have embraced Mahomedanism, have been distinguished by a spirit of hostility and hatred to the rest of mankind. The Mahomedans progress in science, their capacity to invent, and even their willingness to adopt any useful or elegant arts, bear no proportion to their zeal and activity in the support of their religious tenets. Throughout every country where Mahomedanism is professed, the same deep pause is made in philosophy; and the same wide chasm is to be seen between the opportunities of men to improve, and their actual improvement." *

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* Dr. White's Bampton Lectures.

The whole current of history is, however, unfortunately against this learned professor. The revival, and the subsequent cultivation of letters, is unquestionably due to the Saracens. To them we are, moreover, indebted for the invention of paper made from linen, of gunpowder, of the magnetic needle, and of the pendulum; and for many important improvements in mathematics, in geography, and astronomy.* In regard to their moral, and more domestic character, I have at present nothing new to say. Many years local information had enabled me to speak of them formerly, and in an unequivocal manner favourably; and that too, nearly at the time, I believe, with the eloquent doctor's admirable publication, from which the above is an extract. †

By an ordinance, the emperor Frederic adjudged all persons, without distinction, to be burned, who were convicted of heresy by the ecclesiastical judge. ‡ The same emperor, by another constitution, ordained, that if any temporal lord, admonished by the church, should neglect to clear his territories of heretics, within the year,
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* L'Abbe Andres.

† Philosophical Rhapsodies.

‡ De Rebus Belgicis.

it should be lawful for good Catholics to seize and occupy the lands, and utterly to exterminate the heretical professors. And upon this foundation was built that arbitrary power so long claimed, and so fatally exerted by the pope, of disposing even of the kingdoms of refractory princes, to the more dutiful sons of the clergy.* But could you conceive it possible, even in the annals of depravity itself, that after the Duke of Alva had put to death, in cold blood, more than eighteen thousand persons, for daring to adore their God, in the manner most consonant to their own reason, Veraguas, a favourite of his, should say, "The Duke's lenity and compassion had ruined the king's affairs in the Netherlands."†

The first apologists of Christianity, and the first missionaries who preached the gospel to the Barbarians, claimed, indeed, and extended the benefit of toleration. But after their successors had established their spiritual dominion, they hastened to exhort all Christian kings to extirpate, without mercy, the remains of superstition, and to shew that the Christian religion admitted of no inter-community. Un-
resisting

* Blackstone.

† Lyndewode de Hereticis.

resisting patience, they said; was the portion of the infant church only ; but now that she was come to maturity, she ought to correct her children.*

* Letter of Peter of Celles to St. Thomas of Canterbury.

LETTER XCIX.

THE miseries of Rome were awful subjects of contemplation towards the close of the sixth century. By the removal of the seat of empire, and the successive loss of the provinces, the sources of public and private opulence were exhausted; the lofty tree, under whose shade, the nations of the earth had reposed, was deprived of its leaves and branches; and the sapless trunk was left to wither on the ground. Hence, curiosity and ambition no longer attracted the nations to the capital of the world; but, if chance or necessity directed the steps of a wandering stranger, he viewed with horror the vacancy and solitude of the city, and might have been tempted to ask, Where is the senate, and where is the people?*

Yet, in this very sixth century, according to the report of a Nestorian traveller,† Christianity

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was

* Gibbon.

† Cosmas.

was successfully preached to the Bactrians, the Huns, the Persians, the Indians, the Pers-Armenians, the Medes, and the Elamites. The Barbaric churches, from the Gulf of Persia, to the Persian sea, were almost infinite. The coasts of Malabar and Choromandel, with the island of Ceylon, and even Bengal and Hindostan, were peopled with an increasing multitude of Christians. At Madras, the gospel was preached by St. Thomas; and at the end of the ninth century, his shrine in the neighbourhood was visited by the ambassadors of Alfred of England; and their return, with pearls and spices, rewarded the zeal of the British monarch.*

This was five hundred years before the Portuguese had discovered the passage to the east by the Cape of Good Hope. Under the reign of the Caliphs, the Nestorian church was diffused from China to Jerusalem and Cyprus; and their numbers, with those of the Jacobites, were computed to surpass the Greek and Latin communities.† In the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries, the reign of the gospel and the church was extended over Bulgaria, Hungary, Bohemia, Saxony, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Poland, and Russia. Italy, Gaul, Greece, Britain, and Ireland,

* Saxon Chronicle, and Will. of Malmsb. † Hist. Hierosol.

land, had long before been converted. But, the coast of the Baltic, from Holstein to the Gulf of Finland, was not so early invaded under the standard of the cross. The reign of idolatry was not closed, until the conversion of Lithuania, in the fourteenth century. This conversion of the north, truth and candour must indeed acknowledge, says the historian,* imparted many temporal benefits, both to the old and the new Christians. The rudiments of humanity, arts, and sciences, were by this means introduced into the savage countries of the globe. They imbibed the free and generous spirit of the European republic; and gradually shared the light of knowledge, which arose on the western world.

The monasteries, as I have already said, however contributed materially to this improvement. They were, in rude ages, the respectable seminaries of learning, the refuge often of the unfortunate, and the asylums of the poor. They were, at all times, the hospitable roofs, where charity, prompted by religion, dispensed her alms. And scarce any of them are to be traced, where you will not find, that they were the support of the indigent and helpless; or, if nothing better,

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* Gibbon.

you will at least acknowledge them to have been a happy succedaneum for hospitals.

So early as the fourth century, indeed, I will confess, monks are complained of. This place, says a traveller of those times,* is filled, or rather defiled with men, who fly from the light. They call themselves monks, or solitaries, because they chuse to live alone, without any witnesses of their actions. They fear the gifts of fortune, from the apprehension of losing them; and lest they should be miserable, they embrace a life of voluntary wretchedness. How absurd is their choice! how perverse their understandings! to dread the evils, without being able to support the blessings, of the human condition!

I join issue entirely with this traveller; and readily acknowledge, that celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, solitude, and the whole train of unqualified monkish virtues, are, in general, every where rejected by men of sense, because they can serve no valuable purpose. They neither advance a man's fortune in the world, nor render him a more useful member of society; neither qualify him for the entertainment of company,

Rutilius.

pany, nor increase his power of self enjoyment. On the contrary, they cross all these desirable ends, stupify the understanding, harden the heart, obscure the fancy, and sour the temper. In short, you have but to recollect, what was lately to have been seen among the Carthusians, and the more wretched brothers of La Trappe, even in France, and which undeniably proved the existence of an ignorant and bigotted order of men, who crept through one continued gloom of miserable superstition.

Institutions may be laudable, though their fruits may not always be salutary. The original fault, in the present case, was, that men approved only in cool and general terms of the social duties, but extolled, as the acmé of perfection, the monastic discipline. Even some savage saints of both sexes, have been admired, whose naked bodies, we are told, were only covered by their long hair. They aspired to reduce themselves to the rude and miserable state, in which the human brute is scarcely to be distinguished above his kindred animals. And a number of Anchorites derived their name from the humble practice of grazing, in the fields of Mesopotamia, with the common herd. The great St. Ephrem com-

posed a panegyric on these *Booxoi*, or grazing monks.*

We frequently fancy well, though we do not always act justly. Almost all men's thoughts, while they are general, are right; and most hearts are pure, while temptation is out of the way. It is easy for example to awaken generous sentiments in privacy; to despise death, when there is no danger; and to glow with benevolence, when there is nothing to be given. While such ideas are formed, they are felt, and self love does not suspect the gleam of virtue to be the meteor of fancy. But, of things that terminate in this life, the world, or what is the same thing, common sense must be the proper and the only judge. No fallacy can long charm us into absurdity. It is not possible for a sane mind, for any continuance, to look upon mankind, either as emmets, below his serious attention, or as monsters, more worthy of his hatred than his regard.

There have been philosophers, melancholy moralists, indeed, who have perpetually reproached us with our happiness, while so many of our brethren are in misery, who have regarded as
impious,

* Tillemont.

impious, the natural joy of prosperity, which does not think of the many wretches that are at every instant labouring under all sorts of calamities; in the languor of poverty, in the agony of disease, in the horrors of death, and under the insults and oppression of their enemies. Commiseration for those miseries which we never saw, which we never heard of, but which, we may be assured, are at all times infesting such numbers of our fellow creatures, ought, they think, to damp the pleasures of the fortunate, and to render a certain melancholy dejection common to all men.

But, first of all, this extreme sympathy with misfortunes, of which we know nothing, seems altogether absurd and unreasonable. Take the whole earth at an average, for one man who suffers pain or misery, you will find twenty in prosperity and joy, or at least in tolerable circumstances. No reason then surely can be assigned, why we should rather weep with the one, than rejoice with the twenty. This artificial commiseration, besides, is not only absurd, but seems altogether unattainable; and those who affect this character, have commonly nothing but a certain hypocritical sadness, which, without reaching the heart, serves only to render the countenance

nance and conversation impertinently dismal and disagreeable. And last of all, I cannot but think, that this disposition of mind, even if it could be attained, would be perfectly useless, and could serve no other purpose, than to render miserable the person who possessed it. For to what purpose, let me ask, should we trouble ourselves about the world in the moon? *

It must proceed from a total misapprehension of the design of the Christian dispensation, or from a very ignorant interpretation of the particular injunctions, forbidding us to make riches or honours our primary pursuit, or the prompt gratification of revenge our first principle of action, to infer, that an individual Christian is obliged, by his religion, to offer his throat to an assassin, and his property to the first plunderer. Nor do I know of any principles in the gospel; which debar a man from the possession of domestic comforts, or deaden the activity of his private friendships, or prohibit the exertion of his utmost ability in the service of the public. The *nisi quietum nihil beatum*, is no part of the Christian's creed; his virtue is an active virtue. And we justly refer to the school of Epicurus the doctrine concerning abstinence from marriage,

* Adam Smith.

marriage, from the cultivation of friendship, from the management of public affairs, as suited to that selfish indolence, which was the favourite tenet of that philosophy. *

It is difficult, indeed, to rise to that elevation of character, which is not supported by the flattery of self-love, but alone exists by the firmness of consistency. It was a severe and a just reproach to the Pharisees, that "they said, but did not." They sat in the seat of Moses, and expounded the moral law ; but they wore the mask of hypocrisy, and listened not to the cry of the supplicating widow. The philosophers of Paganism thus adorned the dictates of wisdom with the graces of eloquence ; but, they often sullied the purity of their schools with the stains of immorality. In the Christian character, however, the opposite extremes of torpid apathy, and boundless gratification, are readily to be avoided : in this school the Stoic may learn to relax his principles with decorum ; and the Epicurean, to find pleasure in the pursuit of virtue. Temperance, justice, benevolence, and piety, are the qualities which shed the most soft and pleasing lustre over the scenes of domestic, as well as public life ; which refine

* Bishop Watson.

refine the feelings of nature, and advance the happiness of society; which adorn the father in the circle of his family, and dignify the statesman at the helm of affairs.*

Mankind, at all times, readily sympathize with those common joys which flow from common causes. It is decent, for instance, to be humble, amid great prosperity; but, we can scarcely express too much satisfaction in all the little occurrences of every day's life, in the company with which we spent the evening last night; in the entertainment we partook of; in what was said, and what was done; in all the little incidents of the present conversation; and in all those frivolous nothings, which fill up the void of human life. Nothing is more graceful, than that habitual cheerfulness which is always founded upon a peculiar relish for all the little pleasures which common occurrences afford. We readily sympathize with it. It inspires us with the same joy, and makes every trifle offer itself to us under the same agreeable aspect, with which it appears to another person, endowed with the same happy disposition.

Hence

* Kett.

Hence it is that youth, the season of gait, so instantaneously engages our affections. That propensity to joy, which seems to animate the bloom, and to sparkle from the eyes of youth and beauty, though in a person of the same sex, exalts even the aged to a more joyous mood than ordinary. They forget for a time, their infirmities, and give themselves up to those agreeable ideas and emotions, to which they have long been strangers; but which, when the presence of so much happiness recalls them to their breast, take their place there, like old acquaintance, from whom they are sorry to have ever been parted, and whom they embrace more heartily upon account of this long separation. *

Nor think me poetical in this painting. Nothing, you cannot but allow, is more certain, than that even in regard to the body, those who pass cheerfully through life, have in general the most healthy appearance. “*Videmus eos qui animo læto et hilari sunt, cibum facilius et celerius concoquere.*” † The action of the heart being invigorated, the extreme vessels become completely filled, and the countenance receives that glow and animation, which are so indicative of good health.

A joyous

* Theory of Moral Sentiments.

† Sennertus de Viribus Imag.

A joyous state of mind, therefore, by thus contributing to support the general vigour of the body, may tend not only to preserve it from the attack of particular diseases, but also to prolong life.

A late writer, in his *Comparative View of the State and Faculties of Man*, observes, that the men in France, in all periods of life, even in the most advanced age, never associate exclusively with one another, but spend all the hours they can spare from business or study, with the female sex; with the young, the gay, and the happy; and that they live longer; and what is of much greater consequence, live more happily, and enjoy their faculties of body and mind more entire in old age, than any other people in Europe. This observation is certainly a just one. The French had always good humour, cheerfulness, and vivacity; and they owed much of it, most undoubtedly, to the lively and sweet society of those, who alone are capable of unknitting the clouded brow, and of chasing away by the little endearments of affection; the crosses and vexations of a jarring world. But, dare I ask of you, who are constantly mixing with them, is it so still? I trust it may. But, the monster politics, I fear, generates baneful distempers. Man no longer is himself, when
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drawn into the interested vortex. Bound up in visionary ways and means ; preyed upon by the devouring hunger of friends ; and pelted, hooted, and followed by merciless or disappointed enemies, the kind dispositions soon succumb under the selfish conflict. Was it in nature for Prometheus to experience tranquility and comfort, while chained on the rock of Caucasus ? As the vulture gnawed, the wretched frame quivered in agonizing unison. And hence let our mirthful neighbours pardon the admonition, and be guardedly on the watch against that sombre, phlegmatic, taciturnity, which, whether deservedly or not, they have so expressively identified, *comme la maladie Anglaise*. I may be mistaken, (pardon the digression) but, I scarcely think, you will now find it an easy matter, to detect even an inoffensive Abbé at a French lady's toilette. Do not the wise ones all huddle together into a detached corner of the room, and there settle the affairs of the nation ; while the poor women are left comfortlessly to mope over *leurs ennuyeuse, et tristes occupations* ? Too much thought, too much mental anxiety, is unquestionably pernicious to the human constitution. We all know how injuriously excesses of passion operate. To instance, particularly in anger : this one irrational impulse alone, is capable

capable of producing incalculable mischief. Even in the milk of the mother or the nurse, such a change has been occasioned by anger, as to destroy its nutritive quality, and to render it baneful in the highest degree to the infant. On this account, physicians have gone so far as to lay it down as a principle, that those who are forced, from ill health, or other circumstances, to employ nurses, ought not merely to make choice of those who possess an healthy and vigorous state of body, but such whose minds, at the same time, are least liable to be disturbed by the influence of passion. For although they do not suppose (what is, perhaps, not altogether improbable) that the child can imbibe the virtues or dispositions of the persons who suckle it, yet they do not doubt, that the nutritious property of the milk may be destroyed by the operation of any violent or excessive emotion.*

The source of anxiety, however, the most insupportable (to recur to our former subject) is that of mistaken religion. This, in persons of weak minds, has led to the most fatal extremes. In any perturbation of spirit, the first thing, you will perceive, is, that the appetite for food is uncertain, and the pulse irregular; being at one time

* Dr. Corp's Essay on Body and Mind.

time slow; at another quick, and in general feeble. Sleep also, you will find, frequently interrupted by incubus, or frightful dreams. Till at length, the whole nervous system becomes so impaired by the reiterated counteractions of hope and fear, that the whole body becomes relaxed, and sinks into debility. The brain then gives way: the memory moulders, and gives up its stores; and fatuity, or mania, unavoidably closes the scene.

Not being, therefore, one of the sect of the Hea-then Heracitus, or what is just as bad, belonging to any of the crying, groaning, or lacerating Christian sects, I hold it incumbent on every individual to oppose, as much as is in his power, all anxious propensities, and strenuously to endeavour, by every innocent means, to divert his mind, and to keep it, in the serene equilibrium of tranquility and contentment. And hence, you may believe me, the prosecution of natural philosophy, of the arts, or of any other subjects, whether of amusement or of profit, is always of the highest importance. Where mental resources have been fewest, there the anxious passions have been invariably the most prevalent. Even where the former have abounded, but have been misused, the brain has been often seen to prey on itself, and

and to be ultimately destroyed by intensity of application. Thus it accordingly happens, that persons who have withdrawn themselves from the bustle of public life, to which they have been long accustomed, especially if they have given up general society, which is often the consequence, are more particularly liable to the intrusion of the severest enemy.

The insignificant intruder Self, is, at times; one of the most impertinent companions in the world. You may try every art and contrivance in your power, to get free from his troublesome conversation; the creature will press upon your retirement, and force himself upon you, in spite of your teeth; will be meddling in your affairs, setting them in such a light as cannot fail to put you out of humour; or teasing you with reflections, that make you weary of your life. No place is safe from him: he will force himself into the closet, hover about the bed, and penetrate through the thickest darkness, into the deepest recess; will travel with you by land and sea; and will not quit you, even though you be in banishment. There is a very whimsical circumstance, at the same time, attendant upon this paradoxical character. Most people are reproached with loving him with the greatest partiality

partiality and fondness; and are greatly delighted, it is said, to hear him praised; yet very few seek to come to the knowledge of him, or cultivate his acquaintance; nay, the greater part try all possible means to avoid encountering him. It is surprizing to see, say they, the pains that are continually taken, and the contrivances used, to get rid of this universal phantom. Some flatter him, some bully him, some endeavour to impose upon him, some carry him to the gaming table, others to the bottle, and the like. But he never fails to detect their frauds, and to resent them with severity. Like the reckoning, he appears after the voluptuous banquet is over, and not unfrequently reproaches one with profusion, and another with satiety. Nay, so galling are his reprehensions, and so troublesome his intrusion, that there have not been wanting instances, even in high life, of some, who not being able to keep him off otherwise, have called into their relief the halter, dagger, or pistol, and fairly removed themselves into another world to get rid of him.*

These are facts respecting the human character, which are not to be denied,* nor should they be concealed. Madness results from the extreme of austerity, as well as from the excess of

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gratification.

* World. •

gratification. We are very averse, indeed, to retrospection; and in our eagerness to grasp the passion of the present moment, we hate to be admonished by past experience. Scorning the salutary ties of prescription, we mistake novelty for excellence; and reflect not, that in proportion as we differ from the wise and the exemplary who have gone before us, we may become criminal in sentiment, if not degenerate in practice. The pride of opinion, at all times, weakens reverence, and abates curiosity. "To ask for the old paths" is a mark of wisdom; but a distempered imagination is lorded over by the tyranny of passions; and what colours are to be distinguished by the blind?

Were it possible that a human creature could grow up to manhood, in some solitary place, without any communication with his own species, I allow he could no more think of his own character, of the propriety or demerit of his own sentiments and conduct, or of the beauty or deformity of his own mind, than he could of the beauty and deformity of his own face. These are objects which he cannot see, which naturally he does not look at, and with regard to which, he is provided with no mirror which can present them to his view. Bring him into society,
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however, and he is immediately provided with that mirror. The business of true philosophy is then to consult and promote general, as well as individual happiness. She must not, let me be permitted to say it, be confined to a tub or to a cell. Her sphere is in the senate, or in the cabinets of kings. One good sovereign, minister, or subject, one man, in a word, who can give currency and vigour to virtue, is of more value than all the speculative, cloistered cenobites, or cynical revilers of princes and magistrates, that ever lived.

A life of meditation and prayer being extraordinary, and fancifully sublime, may, I will grant you, command the veneration of the people. But it is ill calculated to obtain the suffrage of the discriminating philosopher, who, in the conduct of this transitory life, would consult the feelings of nature, and the interests of humanity. There are two very natural propensities, which we may distinguish in the most virtuous and liberal disposition, the love of pleasure, and the love of action. To the love of pleasure we may ascribe most of the agreeable, to the love of action we may attribute most of the useful and respectable, qualifications. The character, in which both should be

united and harmonized, would seem, therefore, to constitute the most perfect idea of human nature. *

Pride, indeed, I know, is equal in all men ; and the only difference which is ever found to exist in it, is the manner of exhibiting it. Interest, likewise, speaks all languages, and assumes all sorts of characters, even that of disinterestedness. There is in the human breast, unquestionably, a perpetual vicissitude and generation of passions. The ruin of one is as certainly the beginning of another. From avarice, how often do we see spring prodigality ; from prodigality, avarice ; and, not unfrequently, firmness from timidity, and boldness from cowardice ! Our dispositions and propensities, thus, frequently have become ridiculous in the extreme. This man, for instance, languishes for love, and the less he is beloved, the more furious becomes his passion. That man marries the portion, but is comfortably indifferent about the wife. This man connives at the gallantries of his *cara sposa*. He even civilly, with the aid of the Cavaliere Servante, forms a side of what the Italians quaintly denominate *uno triangolo equilatero*. That man is so jealous, he will not suffer his treasure to
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* Gibbon.

be out of his sight. Here is a graceless youth, who dances on the grave of a tender and an affectionate father. There is a voluptuary, who reduces himself to penury by one glorious feast. Here is a non-entity, whose sovereign happiness consists in idleness, indifference, and sleep. There run a pack of busy souls, inattentive to their own affairs, but all nerve and electricity for the affairs of others. Here is a miser, who starves himself, that others, whom he cares not about, may fare sumptuously when he is dead. There is an animal, who delights in litigation; and here is a poor devil, with pease in his shoes, footing it away to Rome, Loretto, or Jerusalem: in short, there is no enumerating the harlequin catalogue.

“Le Caprice de notre humeur,” says a French moralist, “est encore plus bizarre, que celui de la fortune.”* Happiness is evidently, then, in the passion, and not in the thing; which is the reason why felicity arises from having what one loves, and not from having what others look upon as delightful. And hence further, it is generally true, that when we cannot find repose in ourselves, it is in vain to look for it elsewhere. The mantled sages of the earth, therefore, who look upon the vast majority without the pale of their own philo-

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sophy,

* Philosoph, Morale.

sophy, as so many fleeting shadows of insignificance, may still continue to ransack and dive into abstracted and pompous essences. But, let them say what they please, eccentric nature, very much above the stretch of their proud abilities, will for-ever puzzle, and for-ever continue to sport with, them and their conjectures.

But, is the priest, let me ask, of whom we have been speaking, who prefers austerities and mortification to ease and social enjoyment, the only palpable and positive lunatic we are acquainted with ? He who resolves to read every thing, it is observed, will neither have time, nor capacity, to do any thing else. He will not, for instance, be able to think, without which it is ridiculous to read ; nor to act, without which it is ridiculous to think. He will assemble materials, indeed, with much pains, and purchase them at much expence ; but, he will neither have leisure nor skill to frame and prepare them for use. Reading, it is true, in like manner, makes a scholar ; yet every scholar is not a philosopher ; nor every philosopher a wise man.* Knowledge, therefore, is the only thing, which, next to virtue, truly and essentially raises one man above another. It finishes, if I may be allowed the expression,

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* Bolingbroke.

one half of the human soul. It makes existence pleasant, fills the mind with entertaining views, and administers to it a perpetual series of gratification.

Fanaticism has accordingly, in my judgment, shed a gloomy tinge on the profession of Christianity. For among the many prejudices which the thoughtless and dissipated entertain against it, one is, that it is the declared enemy of wit and genius. Yet, says an able and respectable expounder of its principles, "Piety enjoins no man to be dull." * Neither is Christianity morose or severe, although the fashionable, and simulant popular air of candour and toleration, which irreligion invariably puts on, would represent it to be so. Human happiness, certainly, consists generally in action. At the same time, it is not to be forgotten, that as the greatest part of mankind are more affected by objects which strike the senses, than by excellencies which are to be discerned by reason, they form very erroneous judgments, when they compare the one with the other. An eminent instance of this is, as I formerly had occasion to mention, in the vulgar notion, that men addicted to contemplation are less useful members of society, than those who pursue a different

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* Dr. South.

different plan of life. Here let us for a moment again advert to the distinct merits of the speculative and the active parts of mankind. And I particularly desire it, lest you should have forgotten my former sentiments on the subject. It may appear somewhat contradictory; but I do not know, whether it be not much easier to have a tolerable knowledge of mankind in general, than to have a just knowledge of any one man in particular. Fortune and whim would seem to govern the whole race; nor can imagination itself invent more contradiction, than there is naturally to be found in the mind of every distinct individual. One thing however, at the same time, is clear, that the most enlightened mind is nothing without the practice of virtue; nor even the profession of Christianity of any utility, without the observance of morality. But, above all, this we may be assured of, that indolence is the bane of the individual, as well as of society; and that we should all, therefore, most sedulously guard against the pains and penalties of idleness.

The weak and the mischievous, we are all agreed, are well employed in any pursuit that is innocent; and are fortunate in finding any occupation, which prevents the effects of a temper that would prey upon themselves, or upon their fellow creatures,

creatures. For them, it is happy, that they can fill up a listless existence. But, the most striking exertions of ability and sentiment ought uniformly to have a reference to mankind. They are, in truth, alone to be excited by the presence and intercourse of men. Placed at a distance from the objects of useful knowledge, and untouched by the motives that animate an active and vigorous intellect, what technical, impertinent, and gawky figures should we not present ourselves! To speak, to act, or to think justly of nature, it is necessary to have felt, and to prosecute, the sentiments of nature.

For to what purpose, let me ask, is all the toil and bustle of this world? What is the end of avarice and ambition, of the pursuit of wealth, of power, and pre-eminence? Is it to supply the necessities of nature? The wages of the meanest labourer tell you, no; for they can supply them. Is the appetite keener, or the sleep sounder in a palace than in a cottage? The contrary has been so often observed, and, indeed, is so very obvious though it had never been observed, that no one is ignorant of it. Whence then arises that emulation which runs through all the different ranks of men, and what are the advantages which we propose by that great purpose of hu-

man life, which we call improving our condition ? To be observed, to be attended to, to be taken notice of, with complacency and approbation, are all the advantages which we can propose to derive from it. It is the vanity, then, not the ease, or the pleasure, which interests us ?

The rich man, I perceive, glories in his riches, because he feels they naturally attract towards him the attention of the world ; and that mankind are disposed to go along with him, in all those agreeable emotions, with which the advantages of his situation so readily inspire him. At the thought of this, how his heart seems to swell and dilate, while he grows fonder of his wealth, upon this account, than for all the other advantages it procures him ! The poor man, on the contrary, appears to be ashamed of his poverty. He feels, that it either places him out of the sight of mankind, or if they take any notice of him, that they have scarcely any fellow-feeling with the misery and distress which he suffers. He goes out and comes in unheeded ; and when in the midst of a croud, is in the same obscurity, as if shut up in his hovel. Those humble cares, and painful attentions, which occupy men in his situation, afford no amusement to the dissipated and gay. They turn away their eyes from him ; or
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if the extremity of his distress forces them to look at him, it is generally to spurn so disagreeable an object. The fortunate and the proud thus wonder at the insolence of human wretchedness, that it should dare to present itself before them, and with the loathsome aspect of its misery, presume to disturb the serenity of their happiness.*

The man of rank and distinction is observed by all the world; every one is eager to look at him, and to conceive, at least by sympathy, the joy and exultation with which his circumstances must naturally inspire him. His actions are the objects of public notice. Scarcely a word, scarcely a gesture falls from him, that is altogether neglected. In a great assembly, he is the person upon whom all direct their eyes. It is upon him their passions seem to wait with expectation, in order to receive that movement and direction, which he shall impress upon them; and if his behaviour be not altogether absurd, he has an opportunity, every moment, of interesting mankind, and of rendering himself the object of the observation and sympathy of every one about him. Is it not this, then, which,

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* Adam Smith.

notwithstanding the restraint it imposes, notwithstanding the loss of liberty with which it is attended, renders greatness the object of envy ; and compensates, in the opinion of mankind, all that toil, all that anxiety, all those mortifications, which must be undergone in the pursuit of it ; and what is of yet more consequence, all that leisure, all that ease, all that careless security, which are forfeited for ever by the acquisition. *

It is peculiar to modern Europe, it is remarked, to rest much of the human character on what may be learned in retirement, and from the information of books. We endeavour, we are told, through the grammar of dead languages, and the channel of commentators, to arrive at the beauties of thoughts and actions, which formerly sprang from the animated spirit of society, and were taken from the living impressions of active life. Like mathematicians, who study the elements of Euclid, but never think of mensuration ; we read of societies, but do not propose to act with men. We repeat the language of politics, but feel not the spirit of nations. We attend to the formalities of a military discipline, but know not how

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* Theory of Moral Sentiments.

to employ numbers of men to obtain any one purpose by stratagem or force.*

This is more happily expressed, however, than I can believe it to be well founded. At the same time, I heartily agree with the elegant moralist,¹ that the human mind could not in many instances, perhaps, suffer more from a contempt of letters, than it does from the false importance, which is given to literature, as a business for life, rather than as a help to our conduct, and the means of forming a character, that may be happy in itself, and useful to mankind. It seems, if I may venture the comparison, to be founded on nearly the same principle with that prejudice, which employs so many of our early years under the rod, to acquire, what it is not expected we should retain after we have crossed the threshold of the school.

Practical truths are incontestible. And, if it were possible, that sound speculative and practical principles could be contradictory, the preference should by all means be given to the latter. Men of letters, indeed, too often conceive, that their talents and their knowledge should exempt them from the observance of certain relative

* Ferguson's Civil Society.

lative duties, which mankind owe to each other. But, in this they are wretchedly deceived. All men are not philosophers ; nor are all men capable of unravelling the web of a logical disquisition. He, therefore, assuredly is the wisest, who disseminates, in valuable currency, the fruits of his intellectual labour ; who, however radiant with glory, is still a man among men ; and who affectionately, and attentively, appears the brother of his fellow creatures.

To know how to descend with grace and ease into ordinary occasions, and to fall in with the apparently less important parties and purposes of mankind, is an art of more general influence, than is usually imagined. There is nothing perhaps more necessary, than those secondary qualities, which enable the enlightened man to set off and recommend those of a superior nature. It was very well for the Cynic to say, Aristotle goes to dinner when Philip pleases ; Diogenes, when Diogenes : but, it is not, at the same time, accurately true, that men addicted to contemplation are less useful members of society, than those of a different course of life. He, of man's race, is alone immortal, who fixes moments, and gives perenity to, transitory things.*

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* Lavater.

The advantages arising from the labours of generals and politicians, are in common confined to narrow tracts, and while they promote the interest of one country, lessen considerably, or obstruct the interest of another. Whereas, the light of knowledge, which springs from speculation, is not limited to any single spot, but is equally diffused, for the benefit of the whole globe. Besides, for the most part, the renown only of men of action is transmitted to distant posterity; their great exploits, either dying with themselves, or soon after them. Whereas, speculative men continue to deserve well of the world, thousands of years after they have left it. What benefit do we receive from the celebrated deeds of an Alexander or a Cæsar? But Pythagoras gave us our commerce and our riches: if it be true, that he invented the 47th proposition of the first book of Euclid, which is the foundation of trigonometry, and consequently of navigation. Thus, merit is not to be measured by noise and outward appearance; nor, are we to join in the cry of those who, by raillery and ridicule, would persuade us that nothing good or excellent proceeds from reason and reflection.

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As in the distribution of these things, however, the wisdom of Providence appears, so also in this, that men addicted to intellectual pursuits should bear but a small proportion to those, who rejoice in exerting the force and activity of their corporeal organs ; for operations of the latter sort are limited to an inconsiderable extent of time and place ; whereas those of the mind are permanent and universal. Plato and Euclid enjoy a sort of immortality upon earth, and at this day read lectures to the world. No oblivion has closed over their lives : they are not buried in that vacuity, which leaves no traces of existence more durable, than the furrow which remains after the divided waters have been united.

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LETTER C.

THE studies of sacred and monastic institutions, it is remarked, have tended, for the most part, to darken rather than to dispel the clouds of superstition. Yet it cannot be denied, that the curiosity or zeal of some learned recluses have cultivated the ecclesiastical, and even the profane sciences. Posterity ought gratefully to acknowledge, that the monuments of Greek and Roman literature have been preserved and multiplied by their indefatigable pens. Even in the darker ages, the authority of the priests operated as a salutary antidote. It prevented the total extinction of letters; it mitigated the fierceness of the times; it sheltered the poor and defenceless; and it preserved or revived the peace and order of civil society.*

From the fifth to the fourteenth century, there seems to have been a long night of confusion and ignorance. The productions of many

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* Gibbon.

of the cloisters were, indeed, clumsy legends, which discovered no marks of invention; and unedifying homilies, with trite expositions of the Scriptures. Even in regard to the history of Italy, the very seat of the church, writers were not agreed about the family and connections of the Countess Matilda, who piously made over her estates as the patrimony of St. Peter; and the depravity of certain of the pontiffs was so incredible, that their very votaries pleaded the whole of their story to be romance. Neither was it in England, until the beginning of the eleventh century, that we received from the Normans the rudiments of that cultivation, which has been since maturing.

But dark and dreary as these ages were, cells and cloisters contained some unnoticed men of letters. Sometimes ambition, intrigue, or the pleasure of their superiors, brought them out into the world. There they acted their parts on the stage of life; and thus, at intervals, diffused a summer's sun-shine on a barren soil. But the winter generally returned with redoubled horrors: the clouds condensed more formidably than before; and those tender buds, and promising blossoms, which were called forth by the transient gleam of a temporary effulgence, were nipped

nipped by frosts, and torn by tempests. Long before this, however, certain of the monastic orders, in consequence of their too ample revenues, had deviated from their primitive austerity, and were, in the language of the day, totally given up to luxury and indolence.

About the beginning of the thirteenth century, the four orders of the mendicant, or begging friars, were introduced, commonly denominated Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites, and Augustins; who, by being destitute of fixed possessions, by the severity of their manners, by a professed contempt of riches, and by an unwearied perseverance in the duties of preaching and prayer, might restore respect to the monastic institutions, and recover the honours of the church. The intent, indeed, failed; and from the transcendent degree of authority which the Franciscans and Dominicans in particular acquired, and, exactly as it has since happened with respect to the Jesuits, they became galling, and universally odious. For nearly three centuries, their ambition was unbounded, and their arrogance intolerable. Ball, who was himself a Carmelite, says, "These orders began to lose their estimation about the year 1460.

The extravagancies committed by the clergy, in the middle ages, are, in reality, scarcely to be credited. The deans of many cathedrals in France, for instance, entered on their dignities, habited in the surplice, girt with a sword, in boots and gilt spurs, and with a hawk on the hand.* Nay, we sometimes find them conferring the rank and title of secular nobility even on the saints. Saint James was actually created a baron at Paris.† These absurdities, however, of the clergy, and the high pretensions of the court of Rome, were very early attacked. Pierre de Valdo, in the twelfth century, rose up against them. Wickliffe, in the thirteenth century, followed his example. And John Huss, besides many others in the fifteenth century, were burnt for their heretical doctrines. Happily for mankind, truth was not for ever buried with the ashes of her advocates.

The title of Pope, or Papa, was originally given indiscriminately to all bishops and patriarchs; and it was only towards the end of the eleventh century, that Gregory VII. obtained, at a general council, that this appellation should be confined to the see of Rome. In the Greek church, the ancient mode continues to this day.

By

* Du Cange.

† Froissart.

By this assumption, however, and its co-relative impositions, all true religion, which can be founded only in inward conviction and free choice, was effectually discarded, and the infallible morality of a tainted conclave was substituted in its room. By pretending to be the Catholic, or universal church, and to have received the power of the keys, or the right of damning and saving from St. Peter, the Pope thus usurped a dominion over consciences, lorded it over God's heritage, and claimed and exercised a power, absolutely inconsistent with private judgment, rational enquiry, and freedom of choice: and all this, under the pretence of a sacred deposition, left with the holy see, and derived to it by an uninterrupted, regular, visible and lineal succession of bishops from St. Peter; though it never could be proved, by any authentic evidence, that Peter ever was at Rome, or that his apostolical office and character could ever have admitted of his being bishop there.

At Antioch, in Syria, this hierarchical form of government began, and not at Rome. Antioch was the mother church, till the conversion of the Roman emperors shut her out, and established those of Rome and Constantinople. But the bishops and emperors, in truth, behaved universally

so ill, that in process of time it was thought necessary, that there should be something more than the invisible operation of the spirit. An infallible living judge was accordingly appointed; who, vested with supreme authority, arrogated to himself all power in heaven and earth, and declared himself the only vicar and vicegerent of Christ.

This, it was hoped, would produce peace and unity; for most were content to believe, as the church believed, without knowing what or why. No man, in such days, and under such coercion, it was well known, could be damned but for want of money; and the church kept at first a reasonable market, where little else was talked of but buying and selling of souls. In all this, of course, damnation, though certainly commutable at small expence, was the great and useful engine. Nothing less, it was denounced, than the eternal torments of hell could be the portion of those, who wilfully refused obedience to the church. In other concerns, we know that superstitious errors have only the patronage of superstitious individuals; that men examine them, unrestrained by any authority claimed under a sanction from God or religion; and that they even take a pleasure in laying open every weakness and folly of unreasonable

unreasonable opinions. But here the grossest, and the most monstrous fallacy was sanctified. Human reason was chained in the most abject state of degradation; and falsehood was placed in the chair of truth.

But whence comes this weakness, that men, with complacency, can reconcile themselves to fraud, and with inflexible constancy, can persevere even in the support of knavery? It has been believed, that truth must receive strength from age; while error must dissolve at its approach; *opinionum commenta delet dies, nature judicia confirmat*. And I hope it in general is so. But we have unhappily too much experience to instruct us, that if, agreeably to mythologists, truth be the daughter of time, time is as inevitably the vassal of error. Transported as it were, to more than a third heaven, the hierarchy thus vauntingly strode over the trembling and prostrate Christian world. Casting her eyes around, from her lofty Olympus, she saw mankind every where her slaves. Thus finding herself enshrouded in decrees and confessions, bulls and creeds, she smiled contemptuously on all inferior powers, and in the delirium of self-sufficiency, fancied her reign eternal.

“The theologians of my time, says Erasmus, had so deep a fund of erudition, and they possessed so fruitful a source of difficulties, that the Apostles themselves, were they to have entered the lists with them, would have had occasion for a very different understanding from that with which they were gifted, during the continuance of their ministry.” But I have no need to remind you of either the absurdities or the impieties of those days. The earth groaned under them. Suffice it to inform you, that in the primitive church, the jurisdiction of the bishops was equal and co-ordinate; but that, as Rome had long been the seat of empire and capital of the world, its bishops were on that account looked upon as entitled to some extraordinary respect; and that they accordingly received it; but that during several ages, they claimed nothing more.

In the year 1077, Henry, emperor of Germany, a prince of many virtues, and of considerable talents, was led to appear as a suppliant at the Pope's gate, and to stand there three days, bare-foot, in the midst of winter, imploring pardon. Read, however, the christian-like moderation, and the evangelical charity of the monk, who, elevated to the papal throne, de-

manded this humiliation, as he himself relates the particulars. " Per triduum, ante portam castrorum, deposito omni regio cultu, miserabiliter, ut pote discalceatus, et lanceis indutus, persistens, non prius cum multo fletu apostolicæ miserationis auxilium, et consolationem, implorare destitit, quam omnes qui ibi aderant, et ad quos rumor ille pervenit, ad tantam pietatem, et compassionis misericordiam movit, ut pro eo multis precibus, et lacrymis intercedentes, omnes quidem insolitam nostræ mentis duritiem mitigarentur; nonnulli vero in nobis, non apostolicæ sedis gravitatem, sed quasi tyrannicæ feritatis crudelitatem, esse clamarunt."*

It is not, I acknowledge, extraordinary, that genius and learning should have made strong impressions on a rude and illiterate age. A ray, admitted through the smallest aperture, into an obscure room, appears more vivid by the contrast, than the diffused splendour of the whole luminary; which, though every thing is made visible by its emanations, imparts such general light, that nothing seems to be particularly illuminated. Promulgators of daring pretensions have always, I know, owed a large portion of their success to the darkness of the periods, in which

* Epist. Gregor. ap Mem. del Cont, Matilda.

which they have appeared. Think you, however, a pope could now start up in Europe, or that the incalculable effrontery of hierarchical legerdemain could emerge in times like these, when worthy priests, and honest philosophers, are to be found in every corner of Christendom?

Some time about the middle of the fifth century, the emperor Valentinian promulgated an edict to the following effect: "It is certain, that the only safeguard of our empire is the favour of the Supreme Deity, which is secured by the Christian faith and true religion. Considering, then, that the merit of St. Peter, who was the prince of bishops, the dignity of the city of Rome, and the authority of the sacred synod, have established the supremacy of the apostolic see, let nothing be attempted against its authority. For then only will the peace of the churches be preserved, when the universe acknowledges its governor. We also have decreed, by a perpetual ordinance, that neither the bishops of Gaul, nor those of the other provinces, do any thing without the authority of the venerable pope of the eternal city; but that whatever shall be ordered by the authority of the apostolical see, shall be a law to all others."

From

From this time, therefore, appeals became frequent to Rome, from all the western churches; for the churches of the east had not yet been in subjection to the see of Rome. After this great concession, thus gained by Leo, the fall of the Roman empire in the west made way for the farther aggrandizement of the bishops of Rome.* It was not, however, till many imperfect, and interrupted efforts, to break the bonds of barbarism, and to rouse the human mind from its lethargic state, that the mighty deliverance, in which the mouldering fabrics of false religion and false philosophy fell together, was effectually completed about the close of the fifteenth century. And this great change commenced in Italy; a country which, during the darkest periods of monastic ignorance, had always maintained a greater degree of refinement and knowledge than any other. Pope Nicholas V. about the year 1440, established public rewards at Rome, for compositions in the learned languages; appointed professors in humanity; and employed intelligent persons, to traverse all parts of Europe in search of classic manuscripts, buried in the monasteries. He gave orders for translating Homer into Latin.† Even Leo the Tenth, while he was pouring the thunder of his anathemas

* Priestley.

† Philelphus.

anathemas against the heretical doctrines of Martin Luther, granted a perpetual indulgence for rebuilding the church of a monastery which possessed a manuscript of Tacitus.* Thus the popes of Rome, in fact, though eventually to their own injury, and though their sole design, for so many centuries, had been to enslave the minds of men, were the first to restore the religious and intellectual liberties of Europe.

In the earliest ages of the Christian church, indeed, there were certain seceders, called Gnostics, who were nevertheless distinguished as the most polite, the most learned, and the most wealthy of the Christian name; which general appellation, as it expressed a superiority of knowledge, was either assumed by their own pride, or ironically bestowed upon them, by the envy of their adversaries. Notwithstanding, though they found fault with, and petulantly urged strong objections to the authority of Moses, they yet embraced the faith of Christ; not, however, without blending with it many sublime but obscure tenets, which they, in reality, derived from oriental philosophy. And this you may particularly trace in the doctrine of Manes, one of the magi of Babylon, of the third century, and

* Paulus Jovius.

and one of the most celebrated of the Gnostics. The Gnostics, afterwards, branched out, and were guilty of much extravagance in their opinions. For the most part, however, they arose in the second century; flourished during the third; and were suppressed in the fourth or fifth by the prevalence of more fashionable controversies, and by the superior ascendancy of the reigning powers.*

But you will ask me, what is heresy? This is not, I acknowledge, so easily defined as is imagined. For as councils have been at variance with councils, fathers of the church in opposition to fathers of the church, where is that infallibility to be found, which shall peremptorily determine what is heresy? Or where can we meet with any other unerring guide to the kingdom of heaven, but the word of God, dictated by his holy spirit? General councils cannot be public wisdom; for in those assemblies, the best and most moderate men have not always had the ascendancy.† And I fancy, the more we examine, the more we shall be inclined to believe, that the council held by the Apostles at Jerusalem, was the first and the last, in which the holy spirit may be supposed to have been present.‡

Gregory

* Gibbon.

† Jortin.

‡ Beausobre.

Gregory of Nazianzen, a man of learning, a father, a bishop of the church, and justly ranked among the best and worthiest of the fourth century, informs us, that for his part he chose to avoid all such assemblies, because he saw they never had a happy termination; but that they rather increased, than lessened dissensions and quarrels. "The love of contention," says he, "and the lust of power, are too great for even words to express."* In the century in which Gregory wrote, for instance, forty-five councils were held, for and against one subject; thirteen against Arius, fifteen for him; and seventeen for the semi-Arians.

Joseph Scaliger calls these councils conspiracies. And he was right. For were they not, properly, conspiracies of the clergy against the laity? Even the framers of the articles of the church of England acknowledge, that the churches of Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch, as well as the church of Rome, have erred, both in ceremonies and matter of faith; "for as much as councils are assemblies of men, whereof all be not governed with the spirit and word of God, &c."† But the pious Doctor Scot, in his *Life of Christ*, still goes farther, and says, "that while

* Epist. iv.

† Art. 21.

while men behold the state of religion thus miserably broken and divided, and the professors of it crumbled into so many sects and parties; and each party spitting fire and perdition at its adversary; so that if all say true, or indeed any one of them, in five hundred sects, which there have been in the world, it is five hundred to one but every one is damned; because every one damns all but himself; and he is as unceremoniously damned by four hundred and ninety-nine."

"It is equally deplorable and dangerous," says St. Hilary, "that there should be at present as many creeds as there are opinions among men. We make creeds arbitrarily, and we explain them arbitrarily. We cannot deny, that since the Council of Nice, we have scarcely done any thing but make creeds. We make creeds every year; nay every month. We repent of what we have done. We defend those who repent with us. We anathematise those who do not. We condemn the doctrines of others in ourselves, or our own in those of others; and thus reciprocally tearing one another to pieces, we have been the cause of each other's ruin." Now this St. Hilary was a sensible man; and his account may well serve to confirm us in the opinion, that it is
reason

reason which is the judge; and that fathers, councils, traditions, and scriptures, are "merely the evidence."* The law of reason, as we have often had occasion to remark, is antecedent to every external revelation. They, consequently, do the greatest honour to the Scripture, who suppose it to deal with men as with rational creatures. If the perfection of any thing, whether angelic or divine, consist in being governed by the law of its nature; and ours particularly, the human, in acting that part for which we were created, by observing all those duties, which are founded on the relation we stand in to God, and to one another; can revelation, in any other manner, help to perfect human nature, than as it induces them to live up to this law of their nature? And if this law be the test of the perfection of any written law, must not that be the most perfect law, by which the perfection of all others is to be tried. "I applied my heart," says Solomon, "to know and to search, and to seek out wisdom; and the reason of things."

Heresy is, thus, not readily to be defined. Novelty of opinion has, and ever will meet with opposition. The honour of a whole sect is thought to be engaged, and every individual

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* Bishop Taylor.

is piqued, that another should shew that to be false, which he has all his life, perhaps, taken to be true. So that notwithstanding all the graces of novelty, a new truth will have much difficulty in dislodging an old error. But is not he who defends a thing demonstrated to be bad, and rejects its opposite demonstrated to be good, most unequivocally a knave? But I correct myself: perhaps I ought only to pronounce him prejudiced. For a chancellor of France, so late as the year 1738, had Voltaire's Elements of Newton six months in his possession, to consider, whether he should grant his *imprimatur*; which, after sage reflection, he refused,* in favour of the astronomy more consonant to the history of Moses, and to the decrees of that church, which had compelled the sublime Galileo to retract his doctrine of the Antipodes.

Man, by his constitution, we are told, is a religious animal.† Agreed: only let it be added, man, by his constitution, is a superstitious animal, and capable of every absurdity. However, no set of beings ever had the legitimate authority of judging of the orthodoxy of opinions, and of condemning and punishing heresy. This bold encroachment on the prerogative of Omni-

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X

science

* Lettres de Voltaire. † Burke.

science has, beyond all comparison, produced more mischief and misery to man, than the most wicked of all his inventions. It has disgraced a religion of peace, by rendering it a source of contention; it has destroyed the blessings of freedom, by rendering reason itself a curse; and in every Christian country, it has led men to imbrue their hands in each other's blood. The abuses and cruelties, to which this dangerous power has been applied, will be contemplated with horror, as long as the world shall endure. So uniformly mischievous have been its effects, that according to the state in which this single power is left, a nation is either prosperous and happy, or slavish and miserable.*

It is, indeed, said, the nation or the state prescribes the *formula*, and that the subject's conscience is to be regulated, as the public will directs. States, it is certain, do prescribe such *formula*. But has a nation, or a state, a conscience? Or is a nation, or a state, to be answerable for my believing what in reason I cannot do otherwise than believe? I never understood a government, or a state, to be any thing more than a creature of time only, beyond which it dissolves, and becomes a non-entity. A state, therefore,

* Rev. Mr. Twining.

therefore, cannot be answerable for my conscience. I must be answerable for it myself. How extravagant would be the imagination, to body forth this monstrous individual, or being, called a state, composed of millions of people! To fancy it stalking forth into the next world; loaded with its mighty conscience, there to be rewarded or punished, for the faith, opinions, and conduct of its constituent machines, called men! Surely the teeming brain of poetry never held out so wondrous a personage!

The professors of illiberal religion may here carp if they please: no man of common understanding will believe them, while "I and mine" are the only two avenues, at which they sally forth and enter; and through which alone, all must pass who seek admittance to their sanctuaries. I know not, in fact, which of the two is the less estimable character, he who scoffs at virtue and religion altogether; or he who whines and groans in his prayers, but secretly says to gold, thou art my hope, and to personal interest; thou art my god! Yet let us not be unjust or deal in unmerited opprobrium. The church has been very far from having been always to blame. Ambition, however it may have cloaked itself, has had, on various occasions, an

equal, if not a superior degree of culpability. And hence, according to the historian* (and one instance is as good as a million) Valentinian, A. D. 364, had that strong sense, unenlightened, but uncorrupted by study, that he declined, with respectful indifference, the subtile questions of theological debate. The government of the earth claimed his vigilance, and satisfied his ambition. And while he remembered he was a disciple of the church, he never forgot he was the sovereign of the clergy.

In the middle ages, indeed, ecclesiastics and schoolmen ventured to dictate to kings, and to give rules for administering states, drawn mostly, it must be confessed, from the narrow circle of speculation; and conceived amid the pedantries of the cloisters. But it was more especially the reprehensibly immoral conduct of the clergy, which at length drew upon them the obloquy, that they have never since been able to shake off. During the latter part of the fourteenth century, two or three contending pontiffs were seen roaming about Europe at the same time, and piously cursing and reprobating each other. Many of the dignified clergy also, as well regular as secular, were the younger branches of noble families, who

* Gibbon.

who had assumed the ecclesiastical character, merely for affluence and conveniency, and who indulged themselves in all the vices, to which wealth and idleness give birth. Hence, a deacon, guilty of murder, was absolved for twenty crowns. A bishop or abbot had the privilege of assassinating for three hundred livres. Any ecclesiastic might violate his vows of chastity, even with the most aggravating circumstances, for the third part of the sum. Even such shocking crimes, as occur rarely in human life, or, more probably, only exist in the impure imagination of the casuist, were still venial, on the compounding for a specific fine. No man, in short, dared touch the sacred hem of the priest's garment. Unless degraded from his office, he was even above the reach of the civil judge. And hence the reason, why priests were very appositely called, by the Germans, "anointed malefactors," and why they came to get into their hands, in that empire, more than *one half* of the national property.*

But, it is not the fault of the few who usurp, that nations are enslaved; it is the fault of the many, who permit it. For what can be expected from those who are armed with high prerogatives

* Centum Gravum, sect. 242

tives and pretensions, but that, being actuated by human desires, they should be eager in the gratification of human passions? If millions recede before a single man; on whose side have the defences of freedom given way, or to whom are we fairly to impute despotism? To the spiritless animal, who has deserted his station; or to the vigorous mind, who has raised himself upon timidity and weakness? No man that arrives at the power of governing a supine, or an abject people, can, without infinite forbearance, cease to extend his authority. Even those very establishments, which we have seen devised in one age to limit and to direct, have, in another, served only to remove obstructions, and smooth the way for encroachment; to point out, in short, the channels in which tyranny may run, without giving offence, or exciting alarm. Nay, the very councils, which have been instituted to check innovation, have, in times of degradation, furnished aid to the most daring and unqualified pretensions.

The passion for independence, and the love of dominion, generally arise from the same common source. There is in both an aversion to controul. And he, who, in one situation, cannot brook a superior, is certain in another to dislike being joined with an equal. Hence, what the
prince

prince, under a pure or a limited monarchy, is by the constitution of his country, the leader of a faction would willingly become in a republican government. For can you believe a popular reformer, or rather I should say, a down right intemperate leveller, to be actuated by principles less arbitrary than a Cromwell or a Mirabeau? Such may, however, be sometimes, I confess, beneficial. Like a storm, they may clear the stagnant and pestilential atmosphere; they may at least give it motion; and instead of the fruits of virtue and goodness in a single man, or in a small body of men, they may serve to bring about an arrangement of functions in civil society, which properly distributes, among numbers, exercises and occupations suited to their respective talents. Those who pitifully surrender their rights, then, no man will deny, deserve to be trampled upon. They may indeed have their laws, and they may have their senates; but they must expect to be treated as Pope Gregory treated the Emperor Henry; or as the Centurion, who brought the petition of Octavius to the Conscript Fathers,* merely by shewing them the hilt of his sword; thereby letting the rulers of the world know that petitions were converted into demands.

It is said, that real advantage invariably results from controversy: for the conflict, sharpening, necessarily exercises the contending powers of learning and genius; and each antagonist, alternately vanquished and victorious, extirpates some ancient error, and establishes some interesting truth. Thus sparks of freedom are ever elicited by the collision of adverse servitude. And hence the old, but never to be forgotten adage, that "he who will not apply new remedies to an impaired constitution, must expect new evils." We have above seen, however, that many years before Luther, the intolerable pretensions of the church of Rome were openly attacked by some of its most learned and respectable professors. But these attempts proved abortive; for the time was not ripe, which was to crown them with success; or, which is perhaps still more likely, the abilities employed in so very plain and simple a cause, were wasted in theological speculation, or absorbed in the abyss of metaphysical polemics. The celebrated son of Rotterdam, the lively and classical Erasmus, when he took up the pen of good humour and ridicule at Basil in Switzerland, allured to Protestantism more than all the volumes of the orthodox Calvin, and of all the dissenters who preceded him.

Superstition is a dreadful scourge ; and consequently, as soon as it is detected, it should be, if possible, destroyed. All changes of rooted establishments, no doubt, especially of a national religion, are attended with shocks and convulsions, unpropitious to momentary repose and tranquillity. But, these unavoidable inconveniences do not last long. And can it be seriously expected, for example, that mankind should forever, to the eternal debasement of their reason, submit to the establishment of eighty-four commanderies, and two hundred priories and other benefices in Spain, for the honour of an old devotee, called St. Jago ? Or that the institution by the late king of Spain, in the year 1771, of a new order, immediately under the inspection of the most holy Mary, founded on the mystery of her immaculate conception, should be perpetual ? *

Well may such states, on the glorious beaming forth of truth and toleration, shrink into timid concealment, and most treacherously forbid the introduction of enlightened, political, and religious disquisitions. But these men forget, that a door has long since been opened to free inquiry, which

which can never again be shut. In the eleventh century, as it is said, the art of making paper, such as is now in use, was invented.* This paper increased the number of manuscripts; and manuscripts facilitated, in some respects, the disposition to inquiry. But, manuscripts were not found sufficient for the busy eagerness of research. The art of printing was therefore at length worked out. And this diffused at once so general a light, that men found they could both run and read; whence the mental emancipation which took place at the æra of the reformation. The application is easy.

A man of expanded intellect possesses all his senses, in the manner best adapted to receive the impression of every true pleasure, which Providence has scattered with such a liberal hand for the delight of the human species. There is nothing intrinsically beautiful, which does not furnish him with delight; as there is nothing ugly or deformed, which does not affect him with disgust and abhorrence. In a word, the avenues of his mind are open only to those enjoyments, which bring with them the passports of truth and reason. His conduct is influenced by

* Muratori.

by sentiment, as well as by principle. And if he were ever so secure of secrecy and impunity, he would no more be capable of committing an unworthy or a base action, than he would of the most direct robbery or murder. In every part of his character, you see him, therefore, consistent and firm. He is in every respect the man of energy ; for he alone cannot be deprived of it. The prudent, indeed, sometimes see difficulties ; and the bold, merely the advantages of an enterprize. But the enlightened man sees both ; and accordingly, diminishing that, and making this preponderate, he succeeds. What man shall be afraid, who does not distrust himself ?

While, in truth, men continue to act alone from appetites and passions, which lead to the attainment of interested ends, they seldom quit the view of their objects in detail, to go far into the road of generally beneficial inquiries. None therefore are to be estimated from what they know, but all from what they perform. It is not, at the same time, to be denied, that the universal state of society in Europe, at the early periods of which we are speaking, was not altogether free from those blemishes, which excused,

ed, if they did not entirely warrant the exercise of arbitrary authority in the church. There were, for instance, even so late as the ninth century in Germany, the nobles, or *familie*; the citizens, or *liberi*; and the artisans or slaves, who were *homines proprii*: which latter race, by the way, still exists under the name of *Serf*. A name, which I am sorry to find continuing to blur the chaste fame of that equal religion, which, as the best of the gifts of God, hath unalterably, and through the wide circle of the world exclusively, declared and fixed the imprescriptible rights of man.

The stream of Christianity has been often thus corrupted, though the fountain has always been pure. It is not science alone, we are told, though even founded on truth, that will polish a nation. For this purpose, the powers of the imagination must be awakened and exerted, to excite elegant feelings, and to heighten our natural sensibilities. It is not the head only that must be informed, but the heart also must be moved.* Hence, under the liberal genius of Protestantism, when it had perfected its work, and the first fanaticism of well meaning, but misguided zealots, had subsided, every species

* Wharton.

species of useful and elegant knowledge recovered its strength, and arose with fresh vigour: The laity eagerly embraced those studies, from which they had long been unjustly restrained. And soon after, men attained that state of general improvement, and those situations with respect to literature and life, in which they have ever since persevered.

Not that the reformation destroyed every delusion, or disenchanted all the strong holds of superstition. A few dim characters, which we shall presently have in review, were yet legible in the mouldering creed of tradition. Every goblin of ignorance did not vanish at the first glimmerings of the morning of science. Fatal, however, as it certainly was to the power of the hierarchy, it yet unquestionably contributed to the improvement even of the church of Rome itself, both in learning and morals. The desire of equalling the reformers, the emulation natural between two rival churches, engaged the Roman clergy to apply themselves to useful, as well as to ornamental pursuits. Hence an extraordinary alteration in knowledge and character; and hence the reason why the manners of the secular, as well as regular dignitaries, became so conspicuously

cuously decent and exemplary. Many, it will be readily acknowledged, have been distinguished for all the accomplishments, and all the virtues, that can best adorn the sacred profession. No Alexander VI. or others of the like profligate stamp, have since polluted the chair of St. Peter. Humanity, moderation, and encouragement of literature, have happily gone abroad, as some, though not perhaps adequate atonement for preceding errors and crimes.

No epoch then is so important in the latter history of mankind, as the sixteenth century of the Christian æra. No age ever produced an equal number of great men. No age ever beheld so great a struggle between liberal knowledge and infatuated error. Never were such topics canvassed for the general good, or so ably, or so gloriously combated. Nor, with the consequent expansion of the human mind; were there ever such effectual stops put to the effusion of blood on account of religion. The heroes of this day were not altogether Heaven born generals. They were, on the contrary, constrained to qualify themselves duly for action, by painful labour, by hard study, and by long watchings. Little thinking could not measure with profound subtilty. Nor would the chaff, rapidly caught
on

on the surface of knowledge, in any manner suffice, against the substantial and matured reasoning of the clearest heads, and the proudest understandings.

On this occasion—and it is with satisfaction I recollect it—how conspicuous does your present residence (Geneva) appear! At this season, she united within her locally narrow limits the concentrated rays, which were to irradiate Europe. In vain had superstition planted her standard on the walls of the little city; in vain had a legion of priests and monks endeavoured to establish their influence. The favoured spot, the soil of liberty, checked the mischievous attempts; and drove shuddering bigotry back across Mont Cenis. Geneva, nevertheless, was yet to be considered as, in some degree, involved in the universal obscurity. But the remaining clouds were soon to be dispersed. And it was a circumstance, which rendered the peculiarity of her situation, if possible, still more interesting, that she was now only re-acting, as it were, a part which she had fifteen centuries before exhibited on the same scale of intellectual improvement. Julius Cæsar, you will remember, was partial to Geneva, from his first entrance into Helvetia: he made it a place of arms; he introduced and established

established schools of arts and sciences; and thence enabled it to acquire the glory of being at least the channel, if not the source of knowledge, to many of the nations of the Transalpine world.

LETTER CI.

THE tyrant of Syracuse, in the exuberance of his wit, ventured ironically to ask Aristippus, how it happened, that philosophers were so commonly seen in the houses of the great, but the great never in the houses of philosophers? The sage replied, "Physicians are always to be found in the apartments of the sick."

The reformation of religion in Europe, and the restoration of the arts and sciences which followed, had a powerful effect in correcting and softening manners, and in promoting the interests of society. No man, indeed, can deliver himself up with safety to the sciences, when the mind does not enjoy the certainty of political and of personal liberty. The yoke of tyranny stifles genius, and gives rise to those apprehensions, which freeze the soul, and check the wholesome vigour of imagination. Is it very certain notwithstanding, that even at this day the reasoning faculty is so perfectly emancipated, as to have attained to its full and natural exercise?

So lately as the year 1621, several persons were banished Paris for contradicting Aristotle's opinion about matter and form, and the number of the elements : nay, shortly after, the parliament of Paris prohibited, under *pain of death*, any thing from being taught contrary to the doctrines of Aristotle.

“ Heavy bodies naturally tend to the centre of the universe,” says Aristotle ; “ we know by experience, that heavy bodies tend to the centre of the earth ; therefore the centre of the earth is the centre of the universe.” And this was part of the absurd doctrine, for venturing to dissent from which a man was to be hanged. The same parliament of Paris, in the reign of Charles VI. appointed a single combat between two gentlemen, in order to have the judgment of God, whether the one had committed a rape on the wife of the other. In 1454, John Picard, being accused by his son-in-law, for too great a familiarity with his own daughter, a duel between them was appointed, by the same parliament. On which Voltaire justly remarks, that the parliament decreed a parricide to be committed, in order to try an accusation of incest, which possibly had not been committed.

Aristotle,

Aristotle, undoubtedly, was a great man, and had very uncommon advantages. He was born in an age when the philosophical spirit in Greece had long flourished; and was in its greatest vigour; was brought up in the court of Macedon; where his father was the king's physician; was twenty years a favourite scholar of Plato; and was himself tutor to Alexander the Great; who both honoured him with his friendship, and supplied him with every thing necessary for the prosecution of his inquiries. All these advantages he improved by indefatigable study, and immense reading. "He was the first person we know of," says Strabo, "who formed a library; and in this the Egyptian and Pergamenian kings only followed his example." As to his genius, it would be disrespectful to mankind, not to allow an uncommon share to a man, who governed the opinions of the most enlightened part of the species, near two thousand years.

Yet do not his best writings carry too evident marks of that philosophical pride, vanity, and envy, which have so often sullied the character of the learned? He determines boldly things above all human knowledge; and enters upon the most difficult questions, as his pupil would have entered on a battle, with full assurance of success.

He delivers his decisions oracularly, and without any apprehension of mistake. Rather than confess his ignorance, he hides it under obscure terms, and ambiguous expressions, to which his interpreters can affix any meaning that best suits their purpose.* It is true, he had the daring ambition, and I question if it were not more boundless than even that of Alexander, to be transmitted to all future ages, as the prince of philosophers, as one who had carried every branch of human knowledge to its utmost limit.

Many reasonings of this philosopher have passed, accordingly, current in the world as good coin, both the premises and conclusions of which are evidently false. He wrote a book, for instance, upon mechanics; but was much puzzled about the equilibrium of a balance, when unequal weights are hung upon it, at different distances from the centre. Having, however, observed, that the arms of the balance describe portions of a circle, he accounted for the equilibrium by a whimsical argument. "All the properties of the circle are wonderful. The equilibrium of the two weights that describe portions of a circle, is wonderful. Ergo, the equilibrium

* Kaim,

equilibrium must be one of the properties of the circle." Now what are we to think of his logic, when we find him capable of such childish reasoning? And yet his logic has been the admiration of the whole world for centuries. Nay, this very silly mechanical argument itself has been espoused and commented upon by his disciples, for almost an equal length of time.*

It once was a prevalent opinion among a set of people who dwelt near the sea, that mankind rarely died but during the ebb of the tide. And there were not wanting strong reasons, they said, for the conjecture. Thus the sea, in flowing, carries with it vivifying particles, and these particles recruit the sick. The sea is salt, and salt preserves from rottenness. But on the contrary, when the sea sinks in ebbing, every thing sinks with it; nature languishes; the sick are not vivified; ergo, they die. Now is this reasoning less solid than many of the systems and principles, though of the greatest celebrity, whether of Aristotle or others, to which we have had occasion to advert?

What is seen makes a deeper impression than what is heard, or than what is even discovered

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by

* Sketches of man,

by reflection. Thus morals, manners, and every thing that appears externally, may in part be acquired by imitation and example, which have little or no connection with the reasoning faculty. And hence it is, that in judging of right and wrong, the outward act only draws the attention of the ignorant and illiterate, who cannot penetrate into the will or intention ; and also, that in religion, such preponderating weight is laid upon forms and ceremonies, without much regarding their end or effect.

The bias, however, acquired from Aristotle kept reason in chains for ages. Scholastic divinity was, in particular, most extensively hurtful. Aristarchus, we know, having taught that the earth moved round the sun, was accused, by the Heathen priests, for troubling the repose of their household gods. Copernicus, for the same doctrine, was accused by Christian priests as contradicting the Scriptures, which talk of the sun's moving. And Galileo, for adhering to Copernicus, was condemned to prison and penance; and even made to recant his doctrine upon his knees, in the most humiliating manner. Lastly, Tycho Brahe suffered a most rigorous persecution for maintaining the heavens to be so far empty of matter, as to give free course to the comets,

comets, contrary to Aristotle, who taught the heavens to be harder than a diamond. For how dared any simple mortal, he was asked, to differ from the authority of Aristotle?

During the infancy of reason, it is too true, authority is the prevailing argument, both in philosophy and religion. And though moral sense, and I may even say taste, are born with us; yet both of them require much cultivation. Among savages, for instance, the moral sense is faint and obscure; and taste still more so.* Even in the most enlightened ages, it requires both education and experience, to perceive accurately the various modifications of right and wrong. And to acquire a delicacy of taste, a man must be in some degree familiar in the examination of beauties and deformities. Thus, in Rome, abounding with productions of the fine arts, a valet de place is a much more correct judge of statues, of pictures and buildings, than the best educated citizen of London or Paris. And thus, in a word, taste goes hand in hand with the moral sense, in their progress towards maturity; and they ripen equally by the same sort of culture.

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Enthusiasm

* Elements of Criticism.

Enthusiasm, in general, and in all other points but those of religion, is a beneficial turn of mind. No matter what the object be, whether pleasures or business, or the fine arts; whoever pursues them to any purpose, must do so *con amore*; and inamoratos, you know, of every kind, are enthusiasts. To strike this spirit, therefore, out of the human constitution, and to reduce things to their precise philosophical standard, would be to check some of the main wheels of society, and to fix the world in an useless apathy.

From none would I expel enthusiasm, then, but from religious communities; for fanaticism, on such ground, is her natural offspring. And what so detestable as fanaticism? What so full of horrors? Never have men been so ambitious, so rapacious, so cruel, so seditious, or so inhumanly monstrous, as when they have been persuaded that religion either ordered, required, or permitted them to be so. A passion for voluntary martyrdom, also, as one senseless species of it, must gradually destroy the sensibility both of mind and body. Nor can it be presumed, that those who torment themselves, can be susceptible of any lively affection for the rest of mankind. A severe unfeeling temper, accordingly, has distinguished

guished the monks of every age and country ; as it inevitably must all undomesticated philosophers. Their stern indifference, which is too seldom mollified by personal friendship, or any more tender ties, is inflamed by religious hatred; and their merciless zeal has strenuously administered the holy office of the inquisition.*

Every conduct, which disclaims the ordinary maxims of reason, excites our suspicion, and demands our inquiry. Whenever the spirit of fanaticism, in this manner, at once so credulous and so crafty, has insinuated itself even into a noble mind; it insensibly begins to corrode the vital principles of virtue and veracity. May the gratitude of the world at large, therefore, be upon the heads of those who so early strove, and who still so mercifully labour to destroy it ! For what have not bigots and fanatics made of Christianity ? Yet, let me ask, does the gospel enjoin or forbid any thing in moral practice, which is not equally enjoined or forbidden in what is called the religion of nature ? Moreover, does not St. Paul say, “ Finally, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are lovely

* Gibbon.

lovely; whatsoever things are of good report, think on these things?"*

Counterfeit virtues are always the most successful vices. For void, as in truth he is, of every principle, the simulant hypocrite, nevertheless, has too much policy, not to pretend to the most sublime. But as Solomon says, "Righteousness doth exalt, while sin is a reproach." Thus let the wicked ask their own hearts, what their inclinations are towards such persons as they believe to be truly virtuous; not only to such among them as may be their particular acquaintance and friends, but likewise to strangers, nay, to their very enemies; whether they do not esteem them, and wish them well? Has the direful proposition ever yet been systematically supported, that virtue is naturally an enemy to happiness; or, in other words, that virtue is the natural ill, and vice the natural good?

Fool hardness, it has been said, leads to atheism, and cowardice to superstition. But the affectation of singularity, the vanity of superior knowledge, and the sense of the miseries of fanaticism, have, most frequently I imagine, inclined men

* Divine Legation.

men to an atheistical obliquity of judgment. On the other hand, ignorance of nature, impatience to pry into futurity, the wayward turns of a man's fortune, and above all, a certain but mistaken and extravagant reverence for things established, carry us, in the general, too promptly into fanaticism and bigotry. Sound philosophy is, then, alone truth and religion. But what, you will ask me, is this sound philosophy? Sound philosophy appears to me to consist, among other things, in embracing that religion which God has revealed to us by facts, and in making a proper use of it as far as we are capable of understanding it. Human wisdom may, indeed, conjecture, and may talk of her prerogatives; but she seems too often to find a pleasure in starting questions, and creating difficulties for the exercise and display of her own penetration. Let her not, however, fancy herself entitled to judge of nature, because she can judge of numbers and properties. Can she change, let me ask her, that which is; or can she even dive into the essence of an emmet?

There are, indeed, those who talk of nothing but of extended reason; and of the increased and sublime vigour of the human understanding; who confine themselves within a set of
dry

dry notions, altogether void of the beautiful and attractive, and without calling in the least assistance from the imagination; as if sound reason were inconsistent with good taste. But have not the three short chapters that compose the sermon of our Saviour on the Mount done more good to society, in illustrating a few luminous maxims, by lively and affecting images, than all the logic in the world? And have they not conveyed more light and morality among men, than all the long, tedious, and separating categories, ethics, and metaphysics, that ever were spun by the stagyrite, or were ever knotted into bundles by his indefatigable commentators?

But this is not altogether clear, you will tell me; and that if I will only consult experience, that infallible testimony will prove to me, on the contrary, it has been nothing but holy illusion, which, for these eighteen hundred years past, has overwhelmed mankind with the bitterness of every real misfortune.* What! without religion should we not have had earthquakes, storms, wars, plagues, sicknesses, or death? Without religion, should we not have been pestered by avarice, libertinism, intemperance, or all or any of the fashionable propensities which murder

* Syst. de la Nat.

murder the peace of the innocent, and plunge the keenest daggers into the well being of society?

Craft, I have all along acknowledged, has deformed the fair face of pure Christianity. The most absurd and contradictory schemes of ignorant and wicked men have been vended under the name of Evangelical Truths. Nor do I feel the smallest disposition to consider such characters, as they have tenderly been looked upon, as unhappy exceptions, no more to be blamed than a dropsical person is to be blamed for an immoderate thirst, or a lethargic person for inactivity. God forbid, the *visitatio Dei* should ever by me be construed into a crime! Insanity has the commiseration of the world at large. But in what language are impious interested knavery and insanity synonymous? Call the *beaux esprits*, if you please, an abject, a slavish, and a bigotted generation. Their counterpart, however, are equally bad. If there be a freethinker out of the church, there is also a freethinker in the church. And the pretensions of both are no better than that which the profligate have to be free-livers, and the savages to be free men; that is, that they may think whatever they have a mind to, and give themselves up to whatever conceit the extravagancy

vagancy of their inclination, or their fancy, may suggest, without being controuled by the impertinency of such formal things as decency, or even common sense.

Spinoza, you must remember, roundly declares, that every man has a natural right to do whatever he has power to do, and to which his inclination prompts him. The right, says he, extends as far as the force. And the natural right, or law, *jus et institutum naturæ*, is nothing more than the rules of the nature of each individual; according to which it is determined to act and exist after a certain manner. Thus, the large fishes, as an example, are determined by nature to devour the smaller; and they have a right so to do. And thus there is no difference between men and other individuals of nature; nor between those who make a right use of their reason, and those who do not make a right use of their reason; nor between wise men and fools. The natural right of every man is determined, not by sound reason, but by inclination, by appetite, and by ability to enforce it.*

The days of Trajan were celebrated, we are told, for this, that men might think as they pleased,

* Tract. Theolog. Polit.

pleased, and speak as they thought. “ *Rara temporum felicitata, ubi sentire quæ velis, et quæ sentias dicere licet.*”^{*} Are modern times, however, much behind hand, give me leave to ask, in such toleration? Visionaries and enthusiasts are not now surely persecuted. Philosophy has a free course; reason has fair play; learning and science flourish; nor can any age or country be mentioned, in which men have had a greater freedom of declaring their sentiments, either with regard to civil or religious matters; or where they have had auditories upon which they could make a deeper, or more permanent impression. But why is it that liberty, which, when rightly improved, is the best friend to truth, should be so incessantly abused and disgraced by licentiousness?

If it be true, as even Shaftesbury says, that, “among the vulgar, a devil and a hell may prevail, when a jail and a gallows would be insufficient;” why, as a lover of his country, should this patriot have taken off so necessary a restraint on the manners of the multitude? Had he forgot that his favourite heathen philosophers allowed, “it was lawful and expedient even to deceive for the public good?” The lofty Bolingbroke also asserts,

* Tacitus.

asserts, "No religion ever appeared in the world whose natural tendency is so much directed to promote the peace and happiness of mankind, as the Christian ; nor any in which both the duties to be practised, and the propositions required to be believed, are so plain, so simple, so innocent, and so beneficial." Lord Herbert likewise calls it "the best religion that ever existed." Dr. Tindal owns, that "Christianity itself, stripped of all additions that policy, mistake, and the circumstances of time have made to it, is a most holy religion." Even the moral philosopher expresses himself to the same purpose. And Mr. Chubb is, in candour, forced at last to acknowledge, "that Christianity, if it could be separated from every thing that hath been blended with it, yields a much clearer light, and is a more safe guide to mankind, than any other traditionary religion, as being better adapted to improve and perfect human nature."

Thus one and all, we find, subscribe to the truth of what, nevertheless, one and all endeavour to vilify. Can such intemperance, then, be the legitimate offspring of true wisdom? From the abundance of materials, indeed, it requires no mighty effort of genius to make out lame facts by conjecture, to support doubtful opinions by some sort of authority ;

authority ; to give probability to what is improbable, plausibility to what is absurd, or colouring to what is most deformed and odious. But why, in a land of Christians, should it be the singularity of the Christian religion to be the more traduced the more it is confirmed ? Every part of its evidence has been repeatedly examined, repeatedly objected to, and repeatedly substantiated. The utmost acuteness of sophistry has, in short, been employed to prove it false ; and yet we may, with confidence, ask its adversaries, Has the attack succeeded ?

Its enemies, indeed, if they think they detect a mistake, instantly plume themselves upon it, affect a triumph, and sing *Te Deum*. Without ceremony or hesitation, they at once ascribe all the miserable consequences, flowing from artificial theology, to the existence of genuine Christianity. Is it fair, however, to make the subsequent abuse of an original truth an argument against its primitive authenticity ? Misrepresentation, distortion, aggravation, are of extremely easy coinage. Falsehoods are, without much difficulty, annexed to truths : and first-rate abilities, when unhappily so misapplied, may spread the most fatal errors.

If we are to deny the truth of the Christian religion, because abuses have pervaded its sacred precincts, so may we deny the use of chymistry, because it has degenerated into alchemy; of astronomy, because it has given occasion to judicial astrology; of physics, because they have been applied to theurgic and natural magic; and even to the plain religion of nature, as it is called, because it has been converted into various systems of inhuman doctrines, of absurd mysteries, and of superstitious rites. At the same time, I am free to confess, it may be demanded, who is there who has not in religion, as in the sciences, encountered difficulties which he has not been able to resolve? Yet still I ask, Should a man, because he cannot conquer every thing, destroy every thing?

It has been, unfortunately, the passion of certain authors to read the annals of Christianity with a view to collect all the contradictions in opinion, and all the immorality and impiety in practice, that could in any manner be brought forward, to discredit the Christian church. They seem, as it were, to have studied, in order to disgrace the most sacred and valuable things; and to have given them such characters as would stigmatize every distinguished

guished effort of human worth. For my own part, I have no hesitation in declaring, I no more look for infallibility in the judgments of men, than I do for impeccability in their lives. At the same time, I cannot reconcile to myself the belief, that there really ever existed, whatever vain display there may have been of such characters, more than one or two solitary instances of truly philosophic minds, who both understood Christianity, and, by fair argument, thought themselves bound to destroy it.

If it be asked, was Christianity, then, intended only for learned divines and profound philosophers? I answer, No. It was at first preached, as we have seen, by the illiterate, and received by the ignorant; and to such are the practical, which are the most necessary parts of it, sufficiently intelligible. Philosophers, on the contrary, when they have meddled with it, have too frequently puzzled the clear, and not cleared the obscure. Virtue, be assured, is antecedent to all law. It is the faithful discharge of those obligations, which reason dictates. And, in truth, what is reason itself but a portion of the divine wisdom with which the Creator has furnished our minds, in order to direct us in our duty? Philosophy, then, is not required for the just

comprehension of Christianity. To be virtuous, forbearing, charitable, and good, are the mysteries of Christianity; and sounder, though perhaps simpler principles of ethics were never promulgated by the genius of man.

LETTER CII.

TO say that mankind are not influenced by religion, is to say nothing. For the purpose of religion is, not to inquire what sort of beings mankind are, but what the light of knowledge, which is afforded them, requires they should be; to shew how in reason they ought to behave, not, in fact, how they do behave. There are, I know, those who accustom themselves to consider religion as a matter of jest. There are those, also, who indulge a ludicrous temper so far as to laugh at all sense of propriety in conduct. Levity, carelessness, passion, and prejudice, thus frequently prevent us from being rightly informed, even in regard to common affairs. How much more so, in regard to those of a more awful consideration? Yet it is to be regretted, for I fear it is a fact, that while weak minds are open to deception from others, men of brilliant abilities have often the unhappy faculty of imposing upon themselves.

The moral system of nature, or natural religion, which Christianity lays before us, approves itself almost intuitively to a reasonable mind. There may, indeed, be a medium between a full satisfaction of the truth of it, and a satisfaction to the contrary : and this state may readily be supposed capable of causing serious apprehension and doubt. But, blasphemy and profaneness, with regard to Christianity, are without excuse ; for there can be no temptation to them, but wantonness. In a word, those who can persevere in traducing the system and principles of Christianity, as if they had a demonstration of its falsehood, would not, it is reasonable to presume, alter their mode of proceeding, even though they had a demonstration of its truth.

What is it that reason requires ? What is it that natural religion, as it is called, would teach us to perform ? Love God, love yourselves, love your fellow-creatures : this is the sum of its obligations. From the first arises piety, from the second wisdom, and from the third, the social virtues. Does not the Christian institution explain, improve, and exalt all these virtues ? To virtue it directs us to add faith ; to faith knowledge ; to knowledge, temperance ; to temperance, patience ; to patience, godliness ; to godliness, brotherly

brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity. In short, whether situated in prosperity or adversity, it teaches us to command our own passions; to encounter successfully those of others; and to place our best dependence on the prudence and firmness of our own personal conduct.

Christianity, it may be readily believed, undergoes the derision of the witty, because it restrains them with too much severity. Because it will not truckle to our passions, or our interests, it has lost all its hold on our consciences. Or if men still retain a few childish nursery ideas of their religion, the licentious freedom of an unrestrained commerce makes them ashamed to own them. They may chance to be their companions, and, let us hope, their comforters in the day of sickness; but they are seldom admitted as counsellors in the more important scenes of public life. *

Do not mistake me; I am not desirous that the freedom of inquiry should be checked; or that the church, as in former days, should destroy every one who dissents from it. Thank the better sense of the age in which we live, no

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arbitrary

• Bishop Watson.

arbitrary fiats can now overset the demonstrated masses of real knowledge, of which Europe is in possession. No heavy Marsius, perched upon a tripod, can now dare to imprison a Galileo, for modestly explaining the harmony of the universe. Yet should the restraints of religion once be taken off, what should we have to expect, but that the multitude would abandon themselves to the conduct of their own unbridled passions? Human laws and penalties would be found weak ties, where there should be no fear of God, no regard to a future state, nor any dependence on the powers of the world to come.

Christianity is not a mere outward form and profession ; it is a living principle, of a practical nature and tendency. What then can those propose who take pains to turn the inconsiderate from such a religion, and to weaken and subvert the evidence of its divine authority? Can they pretend to introduce a more pure and sublime morality, or to enforce it with more powerful motives? Do they propose to render men more holy and virtuous ; more pious and devout towards God ; more just, and kind, and benevolent towards men ; more temperate and careful in the due government of their appetites and pas-

sions, than the gospel requires and obliges them to be ? Do they intend to advance the interests of virtue, by depriving it of its most effectual encouragements and supports ; to exalt the joys of good men, by weakening their hopes of everlasting happiness ; or, finally, to restrain and reclaim the wicked and vicious, by freeing them from the fears of future chastisement ?

All legislators have confessed religion to be essential to the good government of society. They have experienced that laws, indeed, can reach the outward man ; but that the more solemn tribunal of an heavenly, and an eternal judge, is necessary for the inward man. Religion and legislation have, in consequence, at all times, been most closely united. It has, I know, on the contrary, been strenuously argued, that religion, though it be a political invention, is most injuriously connected with the general management of affairs : or, inversely, supposing it to be a revelation from heaven, that no state can have a legitimate right to act in the name, and with the authority of God, while still erring under the guidance of human and fallible reason.

But instead of religion, you would have a good education, and a good morality ; and
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thence, you are certain, would arise a good government. Yet you cannot have forgotten, how universally it has been found, that neither the one nor the other can be well established, but by the very means of religion. To say differently, in truth, would be to run counter to all the legislators, both ancient and modern, to all the sages of antiquity, and to all the unequivocal opinions of the most enlightened of mankind. But, let me ask you, what education would you have men receive, when you have banished Christianity? Or are you to have good education and morality, entirely without a religion?

Bayle long ago started the question, whether a people might not be happy in society, and be qualified for good government, upon principles of morality singly, without any sense of religion? And the question was ingenious, for it gives opportunity for subtilty in reasoning; though it is, at the same time, I conceive unquestionably useless, because the fact supposed cannot happen. The principles of morality and of religion are equally rooted in our nature. They are, indeed, weak in children and in savages; but they grow up together, and advance towards maturity with equal steps. Wherever, therefore, the moral sense is in perfection, a sense
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of religion cannot be wanting; and if a man, who has no sense of religion, live decently in society, he is, I must believe, much more indebted for his conduct to good temper, than to sound morals.*

The many must be led, for the many cannot guide themselves. Individuals, no doubt, without the influence of religion, have been found equitable, charitable, and good. But the mass of mankind are not actuated either by kindness, by temperance, or by forbearance. Abstract notions of right and wrong, or logical deductions from ethical principles are, by them as little understood, as the separation of the rays of light, or the phænomena of electricity and magnetism. To suppose otherwise, would be to manifest no small degree of ignorance of the human character.

Philosophy, in its most happy conclusions then, teaches us only to believe, what Christianity, in its tenets, plainly inculcates, and modestly would entice us to regard in practice. A religion, consequently, so assorted, and so qualified, either for the apprehension of the uninstructed, as a matter of faith, or for the con-
viction

* Lord Kaim.

viction of the instructed, as a principle of demonstration, surely cannot but have merit. The two most unobjectionable characteristics are, moreover, strikingly attached to it. It is that alone which is conformable to reason; and it is that alone, which is allowed to have been revealed.

Locke, I know, declares the gospel to contain so perfect a body of ethics, that reason may be excused from the enquiry; since she may find man's duty clearer and easier in revelation than in herself. This, however, may be more implicit than I would recommend your's, or any other thinking man's faith to be. There is no occasion to banish reason, though there may be occasion to suppress licentiousness. At the same time, independent of its own internal evidence, and independent of the strength which the acquiescence of the wisest and the best of men, for so many centuries, hath unquestionably given to it, there is still one other consideration, and it is solely to be found in Christianity, which has always, I confess, impressed conviction on my mind, and that is, the comfort which a man, firm in his religion, whatever be his circumstances, is always certain to find in the observance of its precepts.

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The hour of sickness, the hour of misfortune, the hour of dissolution, falls to the lot of all. On any of these trying occasions, did you ever perceive the atheist derive ease or consolation from the vast expansion of his unbelief? On the contrary, have you not witnessed instances, where the bitterness, of sorrow, the agony of disease, and the approach of death, have been met with the most pious resignation, with a cheerfulness, if I may say so, of submission, springing from that consolation in hope, which Christianity alone is capable of affording? This is, indeed, unfashionable language; and some may even accuse me of an incorrect statement of facts. For though it cannot be denied, that Voltaire, for instance, died unbecoming the intrepidity of his doctrines; yet, did not Mr. Hume and the King of Prussia, it will be asked, die with infinite composure and indifference? Yet, what I have advanced is nevertheless true. And I would dare the boldest anti-Christian that ever lived to say whether he has not frequently been convinced of the serenity, and superior firmness, with which a truly devout Christian may be enabled to struggle with the casualties of existence.

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The great leading truths of the gospel have, at all times, a natural tendency to give us honourable and amiable ideas of God ; to excite our hopes ; to awaken our dormant virtues ; and thence to promote universal obedience and universal happiness. The very standard, by which the superior excellence of the Christian religion is to be estimated, is its coincidence with the true ends of civil society. The sight of an altar, erected to God and truth, speaks to the hearts of all. Guilt shudders at the recollection of a Divinity, who regards with the same eye the powerful and the persecuted. The oppressed lifts his head, and, in brighter prospects, finds a balm for immediate affliction. In a word, religion binds us to our God, as its precepts bind us to our neighbour.

To talk of death, and to die, are things widely different. No freethinker ever saw the near approach of death unappalled. He, who is unprepared for the enemy, has always just cause for apprehension. Yet, though death be terrible to natural attachments, and to natural desires, yet, seen with the eye of faith, he is disrobed of these terrors, and is, in fact, no longer formidable. “ Blessed are the dead which die
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in the Lord, for they shall rest from their labours."* Our sorrows shall then be no more; we shall be eased of all our pains; resolved of all our doubts; cleansed from all our sins; freed from all our fears; be happy beyond our hopes; and all this secured to us beyond the power of time and change.†

Our time here passes apace. Would it not be prudent, therefore, to have our follies and weaknesses, if possible, die before us? But the thought of death and eternity, it will be said, disarms pleasure of all its allurements. Be it so. It also disarms pain of all its terrors. Repeat the words—Death and Eternity! Pause a while. See how all the glories of the world shrink into nothing! And think you, you shall escape the afflictions of diseases; of a debilitated frame; and, ultimately, of the departing pangs of humanity? The day, be assured, will come, when the further gratifications of the corporeal appetites shall have eternally bade you adieu; and when, on the bed of sickness, these questions shall work incessantly on your mind—What am I? Whence came I? Who gave me my being? How have I conducted myself since I came into the world? I am now about to leave it; but to what place,
into

* Revel. xiv..

† Archbishop Tillotson.

into what unknown region, am I to be removed? Where, O! where, am I to make my unalterable, my eternal abode?

Life is short; it is but a span; a flower of the field that soon dies away; a fleeting shadow. Why, then, so lavish of its moments? Why shake the sands, as if they were not falling fast enough? Death, the giddy man may think, he has had nearer to him on a former, than on the present occasion. But he is mistaken. He, in reality, was never so near him: for every beating pulse makes the number, in the gradation, less. When he shall be commissioned, therefore, to open and execute his orders, is it wise in him to allow himself to be surprised or alarmed; or should he not rather, to the utmost of his power, be prepared, "by so numbering his days, as to apply his heart unto wisdom?" Let man at all times be mindful of this one thing needful, to finish his work before he finishes his course.

It was said by Raleigh, when some of his friends lamented his confinement under sentence of death, which he knew not how soon he might suffer, "That the world itself was only a larger prison, out of which some were every day selected

lected for execution." The dread of this earthly termination has happily, indeed, its appropriated stages. It has seldom been found to intrude upon the cheerfulness, simplicity, and innocence of children. They gaze at a funeral procession with as much vacant curiosity as at any other show ; and see the world change before them, without the least sense of their own share in the vicissitude. In youth, when all the appetites are strong, and every gratification is heightened by novelty, the mind resists mournful impressions with a kind of elastic power, by which the signature that is forced upon it is immediately effaced. When this tumult first subsides, while the attachment to life is yet strong, and the mind begins to look forward, and concert measures by which those enjoyments may be secured, which it is solicitous to keep ; or others obtained, to atone for the disappointments that are past ; then it is that death starts up like a spectre in all his horrors ; the blood is chilled at his appearance ; he is perceived to approach with a constant and irresistible pace ; retreat is impossible, and resistance is vain.

Yet, as an exception, I will allow you, it is not uncommon to see the worn-out, the broken down, grey-headed sinner, totter about on

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crutches,

crutches, with an air of waggish jocularitv, always ready to entertain his company with a jest, meet his acquaintance with a toothless grin; and the first to toast a fine girl, when he can scarce lift the glass to his lips. This is, however, merely the struggling glimmer of an almost extinguished flame. Even criminals, who have known that in the morning they were to die, have often slept in the night. And such are some of the not unfrequent effects of mental lethargy.

Hope, deceiver as she may be thought, serves at least to conduct us to our end by an agreeable road. And this I acknowledge. Yet I am afraid, the greater our experience, the more we shall perceive that, of all objects, religion is the most neglected. Eternity is that which makes the least impression; and God, the maker and disposer of all, is the power the least regarded. Could you, nevertheless, believe it, that the witty regulator of consciences, Voltaire, should expressly say to his votaries, "Wherever society is established, there it is necessary to have religion: for religion, which watches over the crimes that are secret, is, in fact, the only law which a man carries about with him; the only one which places the punishment

ishment at the side of the guilt ; and which operates as forcibly in solitude and darkness, as in the broad and open face of day."

To be of no church, then, is certainly to be treacherous to one's self : for religion, of which the rewards are distant, and which is animated only by faith and hope, will glide by degrees out of the mind, unless it be invigorated and re-impressed by external ordinances, by stated calls to worship, and by the salutary influence of example. It is not alone enough to have good qualities ; we must also have a proper œconomy of them, and properly bring them into habitual exercise. And no sober man, I think, can have any hesitation in declaring, that he who does not adhere from choice to the religion which he has received from his country, has no more reason to pride himself in being a Christian, or in being a Mahommedan, than he has that he was neither born blind nor lame. It has been his good fortune, not his merit.

It is a most desirable thing, believe me, to have the opportunity, indulged to so few, of living, some years at least, to ourselves, in a state of freedom ; of living under the laws of reason, instead of passing our time under those

of authority and custom. This it is, which alone enables us to mark and distinguish the degrees of probability, and to establish tranquility of mind where it can best rest securely, and that is, on resignation. Remember, however, that he, who has not cultivated his religion, as well as his reason, young, will find it a very hard task to improve it when he is old : and that there are most essentially two different sorts of curiosity ; the one, (for I am not comparing the individual with the public, but with himself) that of interest, which urges us to learn what may be of personal utility, and what is of most importance ; the other, that of vanity, which urges us to acquire a knowledge of that which others may be unacquainted with, but which only glitters for the moment.

- When you study, then, study to be wise, not to appear learned. Those men have always the fewest blemishes, and come nearest to the perfection of public and private virtue, and have their sentiments, in general, most enlarged, and their ideas most noble, who give themselves to philosophy with the sole desire and hope to become better, and to be more qualified to be useful in their immediate situation. And it is a true saying of the elder Pliny, “ That there are
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few, if any books, out of which a man of good sense may not extract something for his benefit."

It is not for us, however, to drone away life in solitude like him, over the door of whose house, as if his house had been his tomb, somebody wrote, "*Hic jacet.*" Men lose their intellectual powers for want of exerting them; and, from having trifled away youth, are often reduced to the necessity of trifling away age. It fares, in fact, with the mind, just as it does with the body. To set about acquiring habits of meditation and study late in life, is like getting into a go-cart with a white beard, or learning to walk when we have lost the use of our limbs.

Some things, we know, are to be read, some are to be studied, and some may be neglected entirely, not only without detriment, but even with advantage. He who in study would greedily take in all that can be spread before him, indulges a sort of canine appetite. The curiosity of the man, like the hunger of the dog, devours ravenously, and without distinction, whatever falls in its way; but neither of them digests. They heap crudity upon crudity, and improve nothing but their distemper.*

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Affectation,

* Bolingbroke.

Affectation, and a parade of knowledge, is disgusting. A gentleman should, indeed, know much ; but should, at the same time, be as far as the antipodes from pedantry. How tiresome the technical discourse of the mere professionalist ! The state pedant is always wrapt up in news, and lost in politics ; if you go out of the Gazette, you ruin him. The law pedant perpetually puts cases ; wrangles upon every point ; and is not to be convinced but by dint of argument. In short, the mere courtier, the mere soldier, the mere scholar, the mere any thing, is an insipid, pedantic character, and should in no wise be copied. But the worst of all kinds of pedants are surely such as are naturally endued with a very small share of common sense, and yet have read a great number of books, without taste or discretion.*

The memory of man is abundantly capacious. But, if it be not filled with valuable furniture, it will be crowded with lumber : it will be the repository of trifles, of vanities, and perhaps of vices. We should first enrich, and then confide in, our memory. It in general is wonderfully faithful. It becomes more eagerly interested, the more we put its attachment to the test ; and, like

* Spectator.

like a generous friend, always repays habitual confidence with fidelity. The memory, in fact, says Erasmus, "resembles a net, so made as to confine all the great fish, but to let the little ones escape." And this is true. Yet all the world complain of want of memory, while very few, in comparison, complain of want of judgment.

Measured gravity argues a shallow mind. Pedantry and taste are as inconsistent as gaiety and melancholy. The surest means, therefore, to attain strength of understanding, and independency of happiness, is to have the mind so sufficiently enlightened, as that, with his own ideas, a man shall be able to support solitude, and be an agreeable and amusing companion to himself. The notions to be stocked in the memory are infinite. They are easily marshalled; nor is there much difficulty in drawing them out. Nay, so pleasant is this operation, that it may be questioned, whether the mind does not take as much delight in arranging her forces, in disciplining her recruits, and in marching them backwards and forwards on the glacia of the brain, as ever Frederic did in reviewing his death's-head grenadiers, or in parading his legions on the plains of Silesia.

Bacon observes, on the minuteness of the schoolmen of his day, that, "instead of setting up a flame sufficient to enlighten a large room, they went about with a little bit of candle, which, while it illuminated one corner, darkened all the rest." He also says truly, that they broke, as it were, the solidity of science, by the fastidious nicety of their questions. Hence it has been that so many, though undoubtedly learned persons, have both puzzled and perplexed the plainest things in the world, and this sometimes even by means of what they have called explanation.

Your respectable acquaintance, Lavater, if you recollect, thus whimsically, though forcibly, classes the genius and the talents of men : "He who, in the same given time, can produce more than any other, has vigour ; he who can produce more, and better, has talents ; he who can produce what no one else can, has genius." In like manner, the more independent of accidents, the more self-subsistent, and the more fraught with internal resources, the greater the character. There are some who can only borrow, I had nearly said, only steal. There are others, however, on the contrary, who, like the eagle, can seize at a glance : and
such,

such, in their flight, cannot be stopped; like arrows, they pierce through the thickest medium.

But ability is not alike given to all; and therefore its culture is not to be universally looked for. Manner is, however, given to all; and yet how variously does it present itself. Sweetness, brought into the general carriage, is perhaps superior to ability, as it is certainly that which is most charming in life. It is to virtue and learning what the polish is to the diamond. It relieves its beauty, and gives it all its brilliancy. Might I advise any young man, I should say, shew yourself always in this fair and amiable character: nature has given it to you gratuitously; you have it without trouble; and you surely should not turn your face from what you must feel to be an unspeakable advantage.

The calm presence of a feeling and a sublime mind, on all occasions, inspires veneration; it excites great thoughts, and stirs up noble sentiments. Nor can the most eloquent speaker, the most ingenious writer, or the most accomplished statesman, effect half so much, as the mere presence of the man, who tempers his wisdom,

dom; and softens his actions, by mildness and humanity. Even upon the supposition that all mankind were vicious, yet if the vice of hypocrisy were to be found among them, I should be still persuaded virtue was not unknown; for hypocrites, though wicked themselves, are witnesses in favour of the eternal law they transgress, by their dissembled conformity to it.

By what important accomplishments, let me ask you, is it, that the child of fortune is instructed to support the dignity of his rank; and to render himself worthy of that superiority over his fellow-citizens, to which the virtues of his ancestors have raised him? Is it by knowledge, by industry, by patience, by self-denial, or by virtue of any kind? Or is it not, rather, by learning an habitual regard to every circumstance of ordinary behaviour, and studying to perform all the smaller duties of life with the most exact propriety? Being conscious how much he is observed, and how much mankind are disposed to favour all his inclinations, he acts, upon the most indifferent occasions, with that freedom and elevation, which this consciousness naturally inspires. His air, his manner, his deportment, all mark that elegant and graceful sense of his own

own superiority, which those, who are born to inferior stations, can hardly ever arrive at.*

Yet, *in maxima fortuna, minima licentia*.† There have been times, when knowledge, industry, valour, and even beneficence, have trembled, have been abashed, and have lost all dignity, before an empty pageant. "Sir, I hope you will believe, I do not tremble thus before your enemies," said an old, brave, but overawed officer to Louis XIV. And how is the case even now? Let the great remember, for the times require it, that much pains may, as much pains have been taken, and much time bestowed, to teach them what to think; but little of either the one or the other, to instruct them how to think. Their whole turn of education (let them pardon the freedom of the assertion) prepares them, as it were, to live upon credit all their lives; and, therefore, self-examination may not be, now and then, unnecessary to them.

I am not going to wage war with declensions of nouns; with moods, tenses, and conjugations of verbs; nor with genders and cases; neither have I the smallest disposition to insinuate any thing to the discredit of those whom I very sincerely

* Adam Smith.

† Sallust.

cerely admire, the directors of our public schools. But I wish our parents and masters would reflect, how really cruel and inconsistent it is, to be so severe with us when infants, and to spare us so much when we are advanced. Would it not seem as if they thought the art of mumbling a few words were preferable to the art of thinking, or searching into cause and effect? We are lashed into grammar, and through a few forms, and then left to the impulse of our own direction; to think rationally, or otherwise, as we have a mind, or rather as the bias of our appetites may lead us.

But, if we be to act to any good purpose, why are we not taught to think to some good purpose? Great pains are taken to point out to us the lofty sentences of certain classic authors, which, by the way, I protest I do not know, if it would not be almost as well for youth if they had never heard of. Can it be the very best method, however, to confine us to the study of words for so many years; and to postpone the consideration of things, and those of the utmost importance, to the last days of our lives? It is no pleasing sight to see wholesome truths neglected, if not trodden under foot; nor to know, that rational ideas, from ignorance, or not know-
3 ing

ing how to defend them, are, with impunity, turned into derision by the school-boy, as well as by the libertine.

“ Quid sit pulchrum, quid turpe, quid utile, quid non; ” these moral objects I as much respect as any man. But if ambition and mighty passions are to be applauded, why should not reason and healing virtues be equally inculcated? Fontenelle, in his panegyric on Sir Isaac Newton, closes a long enumeration of that great philosopher’s virtues and attainments, with this observation, that “ he was not distinguished from other men by any singularity, either natural or affected.” But what of that? It was an eminent instance, no doubt, of that great man’s superiority, that he was able to separate knowledge from those weaknesses, by which knowledge is sometimes disgraced; that he was able to excel in science and wisdom, without purchasing them by the neglect of little things; and that he stood alone, merely because he had left the rest of mankind behind him, and not because he deviated from the beaten track. Conscious of great abilities, and elevated by a long course of reputation and applause, it is painful, no doubt, to see some voluntarily consign themselves to singularity;

gularity; and affect to cross the roads of life, because they know they shall not be jostled, and indulge a boundless gratification of humour, because they perceive they shall be quietly obeyed.

This seems an easy passport to fame; and those on whom the lot is bestowed, appear too frequently to consider the patience with which their caprices are suffered, as an undoubted evidence of their own importance—of a genius to which submission is universally paid, and whose irregularities are only considered as consequences of its vigour. These peculiarities, however, are always found to blemish a character, though they may not totally obscure it. For he who expects from mankind, that they should give up established customs in compliance with his single will, and exacts that deference which he does not pay, may be endured, but can never be approved.*

But let no man be in haste (of which we, however, see too many instances) to conclude his own merit so great or conspicuous as to require or justify singularity. It is as hazardous for a moderate understanding to usurp the prerogatives
of

* Adventurer.

of genius, as it is for an ordinary woman to usurp the airs of beauty. The pride of men will not patiently endure to see one, whose attainments are but level with their own, break through the rules, by which they have consented to be bound, or forsake the direction which they uniformly follow. All violation of established practice, implies in its own nature a rejection of the common opinion, and a defiance of common censure.

He, therefore, who differs from others, without apparent advantage, ought not to be angry, if his arrogance be punished ; and if those whose example he superciliously condemns, point him out to detection, and hoot him back into the common road.

There are occasions, I will allow you, on which it is noble to dare to stand alone. To be pious, for instance, among infidels ; to be disinterested, in a time of general venality ; to lead a life of virtue and reason, in the midst of sensualists, these are proofs of a mind intent upon nobler things than the praise or blame of men ; of a soul fixed in the contemplation of the highest good, and superior to the tyranny of custom and example. But it is in moral and religious questions only, that a wise man will hold no consultations with fashion, because these duties are
constant

constant and immutable ; and depend not on the notions of men, but on the commands of heaven. Yet even of these, the external mode is to be in some measure regulated by the prevailing taste of the age in which we live ; for he is certainly an injudicious friend to virtue, who neglects to give it every lawful attraction ; or who suffers it to displease the eye, or alienate the affections, for want of an innocent compliance with fashionable decorations.

LET.

LETTER CIII.

THE complaints of the sufferer are not always so sure a mark of distress as the stare of the languid. We seldom reckon any task, which we are bound to perform, among the blessings of life. We always aim at a period of pure enjoyment, or a termination of trouble ; and overlook the source from which most of our present satisfactions are really drawn. But is it hope alone, then, you will ask me, that supports the mind in the midst of uncertainty ? Or would assurance of success fill the intervals of expectation with more pleasing emotions ?

Give the huntsman his prey, give the gamester the gold which is staked on the game, that the one may not need to fatigue his person, nor the other to perplex his mind, and both will probably laugh at your folly. The one will stake his money anew, that he may be perplexed ; the other will turn his stag to the field, that he may hear the cry of the dogs, and follow them

through danger and hardship. Withdraw the occupations of men ; terminate their desires ; existence is a burthen, and the iteration of memory is a torment.

The difficulties and hardships of human life are supposed to detract from the goodness of God ; and yet many of the pastimes men devise for themselves are fraught with difficulties and hardships. The great inventor of the game of human life, notwithstanding, knew well how to accommodate the players. The chances only are matter of complaint. But if these were to be removed, the game itself would no longer amuse the parties. We are not always unhappy, when we complain. There is a kind of affliction, which makes even an agreeable state of the mind, and lamentation itself is sometimes an expression of pleasure. The painter and the poet have laid hold of this handle, and have provided, among the means of entertainment, works composed to awaken our sorrows.*

Religion is the most lasting source of comfort. For what else can fill the aching void in the heart, that human pleasures can never fill? The troubled soul ceases to beat with anguish,
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* Ferguson on Civil Society.

for hope bids it be still. When friends are unkind, and the mind has lost the prop on which it fondly leaned, where can the tender suffering being fly, but to the fountain of all goodness? And when death shall have desolated the present scene, and torn from us the companions of our youth; when we shall walk along the accustomed path, and almost fancying nature dead, ask, where are those who gave life to these well-known scenes? when memory shall heighten former pleasures, to contrast our present prospects; there is but one source of comfort within our reach; and in that sublime solitude, the world appears only to contain the Creator and the created.

Philosophers, however, tell us, that they have read much, and that they have reflected more; and that, therefore, they must be qualified to pronounce on the absurdity of all the canting illusions of the gospel. Yet is it, indeed, true, that they began, and proceeded upon their task with an hearty good will? Or that they have taken the same pains to divest themselves of prejudice, in the examination of the gospel, that they would in the examination of any physical or scientific proposition? But incredulity and hardness in vain attempt to shake the purity of

the moral, or to deny the utility of the promulgation, of the Christian dispensation ?

“ Though the Christian religion,” says Bolingbroke, “ was born, if I may say so, in a desert, and educated by a sect of the most obscure people in the Roman empire ; and though it seemed calculated, in many instances, to be rather the institution of an order of reformers, than of a national governing religion ; yet no religion ever appeared in the world, whose natural tendency was so much directed to promote the peace and happiness of mankind. When it has had a contrary effect, it has been owing to bigotted theology, which, as a science, may be compared to Pandora’s box. Many good things, in truth, lie uppermost in it ; but many evils as undeniably lie under them, and scatter plagues and desolation through the world. Christianity is, consequently, founded on the universal law of nature. The gospel teaches the great and fundamental principles of this law, universal benevolence ; recommends the precepts of it, and commands the observance of them. In a word, it makes right reason a law, in every possible definition of the word. And, therefore, even supposing it to have been purely an human invention, it had been the most amiable, and the

most useful invention, that was ever imposed on mankind for their good.”*

When Bolingbroke could write thus forcibly in praise of Christianity, can we be surprized if the unpresuming Christian cry out, “Supposing even Christianity, which I feel to be eternal truth, to be no more than a solemn cheat, ought I to thank the man, who would undeceive me? To remain under the power of principles which would influence and support me in life and death, is surely to remain in a happy delusion. Why should he awaken me, then, to misery? Knowing my real state to be sorrow, why would he dispel my ignorance, at the expence of my happiness?”

But of all writers who lean in any manner towards Christianity, the rationalist probably has the least consistency in his system. He praises it, it is true; but he is not the less hostile in reality. He acknowledges there may be good in it; but upon the whole, he reprobates the scheme, and insists upon it, that it would have been better for man had he been without it. But why is he so much out of humour? No one would press this philosopher to be a Christian. No man, is

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* Bolingbroke.

now obliged to say his prayers against his will; nor is any one forced to be a Christian, any more than he is to be a Mahommedan. Moreover, as he may easily perceive the belief of it is not necessary to his advancement in life, nor his progress in any profession, he has it in his option to be a lawyer, a physician, a general, or an admiral, without it.

If on an impartial inquiry, however, a man be a religious and moral deist, let him be so. Such were Socrates, Plato, and Cicero, long before the revelation of Christ; and it is still a character by no means disgraceful to a virtuous mind. I would blame no one for want of faith; I would only blame him for want of sincerity; not for being no Christian, but for pretending to be one without believing. The professed deist, most certainly, thus gives Christianity fair play; and if she cannot defend herself, let her fall: but the rationalist assassinates her in the dark. The first attacks Christ, as did the multitude, with swords and staves; but the latter, like Judas, betrays him with a kiss.*

You can depend upon no man, who cannot depend on himself. To bear opinion like a weather-

* Soame Jenyns.

weather-cock, is to have no determination to a fixed point. The Creator, I will concede to the rationalist, no doubt, might have put it out of the power of man to have committed sin, by endowing him with a greater degree of perfection; but who can say, that he had better have done so? In such case, man would have been no longer man; and this world would have been a state of rewards, and not of probation. One thing more likewise, he must allow, that however he may argue, and whatever the quantity of evil may be in the world, we undoubtedly were created for society, and were ordained as evidently to live, if possible, in happiness in that society.

Christianity was long left to shift for itself, in the midst of a frantic world. Nor is the age of infatuation as yet altogether passed away. But who, excepting the enthusiasts of mystery, and the swelling, perplexing, and fermenting spirits who delight in incomprehensibility, could ever have been so vain, as to have comforted themselves with wretched paradoxes, against the conviction of sense and experience? We are not now, surely, to be taught, when in the extremity of anguish, to sing, "*Quam suave, quam dulce hoc est! quam hoc non curo!*" Matters in general now are esteemed only as

they are found and felt. Stoicism, and the system of dereliction from sense and pleasure, does not, therefore, belong to Christianity. It is almost a query with me, whether it ever belonged to any sect. "*Fortasse tanquam phoenix semel anno quingentesimo nascitur.*"

Honest Christians, then, are, above all philosophers, to be valued for the innocent gaiety and pleasantness of their way of thinking. For whether you look into their principles, or into their lives, you can see nothing but what is placid and cheerful. One of the main springs even of their philosophy is, that as God has provided inestimable pleasures for good men in the next world, so he has made liberal provision for them in this; and hence the reason, why they are willing to partake of all its innocent pleasures and delights; for "God is pleased when man receives; to enjoy is to obey."

The man who, by some sudden revolution of fortune, is lifted up at once into a condition of life greatly above what he had formerly lived in, may be assured, the congratulations of his best friends are not all of them perfectly sincere. An upstart, as he is called, though of the greatest merit, is most generally disagreeable; and a
sentiment

sentiment of envy commonly prevents us from heartily sympathising with his joy. If he have any judgment, indeed, he is sensible of this ; and instead of appearing to be elated with his good fortune, he endeavours, as much as he can, to smother his joy, and keep down that elevation of mind, with which his new circumstances naturally inspire him. He even affects the same plainness of dress, and the same modesty of behaviour, which became him in his former station. He perhaps does more ; he redoubles his attention to his old friends, and endeavours, more than ever, to be humble, assiduous, and complaisant. Yet it is seldom that, with all this, he succeeds. We suspect the sincerity of his humility, and he grows weary of this restraint. In a little time, therefore, he generally leaves all his old friends behind him, some of the meanest of them excepted, who may perhaps condescend to become his dependents. Nor does he always acquire new ones ; the pride of his new connections is as much affronted at finding him their equal, as that of his old ones had been by his becoming their superior ; and it requires the most obstinate and persevering modesty, to atone for this mortification to both. At length becoming weary, he is so much provoked by the sullen and suspicious pride of the one, and by the saucy contempt
of

of the other, that he treats the first with neglect, and the second with petulance ; till at last, growing habitually insolent, he forfeits the esteem of all.* If the chief part of human happiness thus consists in the consciousness of being beloved, as I believe it does, can such sudden changes of fortune effectually contribute to present, or to prospective felicity ? Or, in the application of the principles of this idea, can any sensible Pyrrhonist discover any thing extraordinarily alluring, in mounting and galloping over the disreputable road of infidelity ?

It is not, believe me, enough to say, we should laugh at the philosopher who disseminates error, and mischievously propagates libertinism. While a man says so, he may lose his child : his wife may be persuaded, that a regard to her matrimonial vow is ridiculous simplicity : his steward may be satisfied there is no crime in cheating him ; and even his Prince may fancy himself a terrestrial divinity, and that all his subjects are necessarily his slaves. Preserving a distinct and unbroken view on this incessantly shifting scene of things, you will find this sketch is not an overcharged one. And while so many attempts are made to render irreligion pleasing ; while the
most

* Adam Smith.

most lively and entertaining things are continually said in favour of error and falsehood, it cannot be altogether unnecessary, now and then, to offer a few observations which may eventually interest us in favour of truth and morality.

“Dignus tibi sis : multos reges, si ratio te rexerit.”* The good and great, says Plato, form, as it were, the junction between earth and heaven. And thus it may be also affirmed, there are at least two distinct species of men in the world : those who in death are destined to oblivion ; and those to whom gratitude gives an eternal existence : the one literally to be regarded as the children of humanity ; the other, as the inheritors of heaven. Before you give your belief, therefore, examine these characters. Read the texts with your own eyes, and in your own judgment weigh their authority.

In the article even of fidelity, I am very sorry to say, it has not been the custom of a certain class of these writers to be very punctiliously scrupulous. Poetry is, however, natural to lively imaginations ; nor, consequently, in their deductions, can they be supposed over-abundantly correct. For instance, great applause is given by them

* Seneca.

them to those ancient legislators, who were solicitous to inculcate the doctrine of future reward and punishment, and who, on such imposing premises, instilled, at the same time, with religion, the principles of good policy and good manners. Yet, as if it were impossible to be otherwise than inconsistent, they almost, in the same breath, would reprobate the same doctrine in the Christian scheme, and would most gladly deny the hope of future happiness to us, although they would gratefully acknowledge its beneficial tendency to others.

It would seem as if good and evil were not perfectly well understood by them ; or at least, that good and evil were not generally well estimated. I also, in my turn, indeed, may be mistaken. But it appears to me, that real good is permanent and unalterable ; and, as it fills the mind with profound tranquility for the present, so it establishes an entire security in that which is to come. I do not, at the same time, call those positive blessings which are called such because they momentarily stimulate the passions. For how often follow in their train, disgust, torment, and remorse ! Nay, almost all of them are accompanied by apprehension : and, when we fear to lose, we certainly cease to enjoy.

There

There have been men, we may acknowledge, splendidly wicked, whose endowments have thrown a brightness on their crimes; but such have been, in all ages, the great corruptors of the world, and their remembrance ought no more to be preserved, than the art of murdering without pain.* Though buoyed up with ineffable personal complacency, and fancying themselves invulnerable, yet these very men, I mean as authors, in fact, have only been dazzling to the sight of common apprehension; and that simply owing to the glitter of a few well-turned phrases, happily conceived, and carefully scattered through whole volumes of sophistry.

The pursuit of real knowledge is glorious; and he who does not desire to possess it is not a wise man. He, on the contrary, who does possess it, and does not feel grateful, is unworthy of the treasure. But he in whom it abounds, who is enlightened by it, and yet who turns it to the injury of his fellow-creatures, is of all characters the most culpable, and the least entitled to indulgence. For, how inconsiderately do we not see men suffering themselves to be hurried down the torrent; some gaily and merrily, some gloomily and wretchedly? They press upon those before

* Dr. Johnson.

before them, and are in their turn pressed upon by others. Whence they come, they know not ; whither they go, they care not : all rush on as they are impelled : and shall the able hand that can guide, lead them to nothing better than to inextricable misery ?

In the very best of the various systematic effusions of imperious philosophy, I can find no comfort ; for there is no certainty. Must not continual scepticism occasion continual anxiety ? For my own part, I cannot conceive a more agonizing, or a more settled vexation, than that of flying from doctrine to doctrine, the puppet of every fantastic Pyrrhonist : this morning to be a Spinozist ; to-morrow, a Hobbit ; and, next day, a Leibnitzian ; banded about in an eternal round of contradictions, and never likely to rest, excepting, indeed, in a wretched and deplorable apathy. It has been said, that, from this disastrous extirpation of moral and religious certitude in the single city of Paris, thirteen hundred suicides have been committed in the course of one year.*

Nothing is more favourable, at all times, to the promulgation of extravagant opinions, than
lofty

* *Les Provinciales Philosophiques.*

lofty generalities, which are light enough to pass into vulgar currency, and to become the maxims of a popular creed : for nothing gratifies passion and vanity so much, as to be taught to speak that which shall receive applause, without any effort of intellect ; to impose silence, without any labour of confutation ; and to have knowledge, without the drudgery of study, or the plebeian employment of the understanding.

Some men, we know, are to be actuated by shame, who are not to be influenced by virtue. And hence honour, true or false, will frequently speak and impel, while the monitor conscience rests inactive, or is in a state of complete indifference. Hence, consequently, the reason why corrupting the morals of society, and particularly of the higher orders of it, is peculiarly injurious : for manners are only preserved by example ; and example must originate in the first classes of a community. The greater the elevation whence it proceeds, the greater undoubtedly the impression it makes. Corruption rarely ascends. The many-headed people may be guilty of disorder ; but that disorder is easily controuled ; or, from its own insignificancy, wastes itself in obscurity : but it is not so with the superior ranks.

It

It has been said, that a soldier, who should manifest timidity, if not cowardice, under a pusillanimous leader, may, when led on by a hero, become a prodigy of valour. So it is in other cases. And thence may it not warrantably be inferred, that the author, who sacrifices virtue to caprice or convenience, and who seems to write without any moral purpose whatever, even the licentiousness of his age cannot extenuate; for it is the first duty of a writer to make the world, if possible, better; and justice is a virtue independent of time and place. Nor is the giddy libertine, or the dissipated profligate, in any respect so baseful, as such a latitudinarian; for, who can commend, or what apology can be invented for frigid wickedness, or the calm malignity of laboured impiety?* What expression, in fact, can be too severe for the wantonness of him who tortures his fancy, and ransacks his memory, only to leave the world less virtuous than he found it; or that he may intercept the hopes of the rising generation, and spread snares for the innocent yet unborn?

On the contrary, how captivating the conduct of that great ability, which pleads for the virtues of humanity, and which rivets, in fascinating chains

* Johnson.

chains the amiable and moral ties that form the blessings of well-regulated communities : how glorious to exercise skill for the benefit of others ! Has not every man owed much to those who have gone before him ; and therefore is he not bound to repay, in beneficent acts, the kindness he has received ?

That people, devoted to the pursuits of a dissipated life, should conceive religion a difficult, or even an unsatisfactory or unattainable state, it is easy to believe. That they should conceive it, however, to be an unhappy state, is the consummation of their error and their misfortune. For, that a rational being should have his understanding enlightened ; that an immortal being should have his views extended and enlarged ; that a helpless being should have the promise of assistance ; a sinful being, the prospect of pardon ; or a fallen one, the assurance of restoration,—does not seem a probable ground of unhappiness ; and, on any other subject, such reasoning would certainly not be admissible.*

But I shall now hasten to release you from the consideration of speculations, which are in truth not so properly calculated for you, as for those

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• On the Religion of the Fashionable World.

busy and idle persons, whose time and thoughts are wholly engrossed by the pursuits of business, pleasure, ambition, and luxury ; who know nothing of religion, except what they have accidentally picked up by desultory conversation, or by superficial reading, and which is conceived too difficult and abstruse, or, more probably, too much beneath the attention of the intuitively enlightened understanding. To talk to such, about the Christian religion, would be to converse with the deaf concerning music, or with the blind on the beauties of painting.*

Religious morality is not, I allow you, in fashion. The labours of wise and pious men are thrown aside as obsolete and wearisome. Nay, should even a more serious disposition than ordinary happen to intervene, some middle kind of reading is found out, which recommends some half-way state, something between Paganism and Christianity, suspending the mind, like Mahomed's tomb, between earth and heaven : a kind of reading, which, while it quiets the conscience, by being on the side of morals, neither awakens their fears nor alarms their security. By dealing in generals, it comes home to the hearts of none. It agreeably represents the readers to themselves,

as

* Internal Evidence of Christ.

as amiable persons ; guilty, indeed, of a few faults ; but never as flagrant sinners, and finally deserving of punishment.

But uninformed reason, be assured, is by no means sufficient. And hence, the least considerate minds ought to conclude, it may be at least as possible for them to be mistaken, in disbelieving Christianity, who know nothing of the matter, as for those great masters of reason and erudition, Bacon, Newton, Grotius, Boyle, Locke, Addison, and Euler, to be deceived in their belief of Christianity ; a belief to which they firmly adhered, after the most diligent and critical researches into the authenticity of its records, the completion of its prophecies, the sublimity of its doctrines, the purity of its precepts, and the arguments of its adversaries ; a belief which they have testified to the world by their writings, and without any other motive than their regard for truth, and their anxious solicitude for the good of mankind.*

For what I have presumed, by my little mite, to add to this subject, should it ever have the honour to be admitted into the good company of the thoughtless and the free-thinking, they will

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immediately determine it to have been the work of some enthusiast; some follower of Swedenborg; some visionary or some madman. But you, I flatter myself, will vindicate me on these heads, and will assure them, I am as far removed, as any man living, from all or any of these characters; that I once even might have doubted as well as they; but that having had some leisure, and more curiosity, I employed them both in resolving a question which seemed to me to be of no little importance.

And now, by way of peroration, but in words from a much abler pen:—"Your objections to revelation may be numerous," says Bishop Watson to Mr. Gibbon; "you may find fault with the account which Moses has given of the creation and the fall: you may not be able to get water enough for an universal deluge; nor room enough, in the ark of Noah, for all the different kinds of aerial and terrestrial animals: you may be dissatisfied with the command for sacrificing Isaac, for plundering the Egyptians, and for extirpating the Canaanites: you may find fault with the Jewish œconomy, for its ceremonies, its sacrifices, and its multiplicity of priests: you may object to the imprecations in the Psalms; and think the immoralities of David a fit subject
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for dramatic ridicule : you may look upon the partial promulgation of Christianity as an insuperable objection to its truth ; and waywardly reject the goodness of God towards yourself, because you do not comprehend how you have deserved it more than others : you may know nothing of the entrance of sin and death into the world, by one man's transgression ; nor be able to comprehend the doctrine of the cross, and of redemption by Jesus Christ : in short, if your mind be so disposed, you may find food for your scepticism in every page of the Bible, as well as in every appearance of nature ; and it is not in the power of any person but yourself to clear up your doubts. You must read, and you must think for yourself ; and you must do both with temper and care."

" Your difficulties with respect to revelation," continues the same manly prelate, " may have first arisen from your own reflection, or the religious indifference of those whom, from your earliest infancy, you have been accustomed to revere and imitate. Domestic irreligion may have made you a willing hearer of libertine conversation ; and the uniform prejudices of the world may have finished the business at a very early age, and left you to wander through life with-

out a principle to direct your conduct, and to die without hope. I am far from wishing you to trust the word of the clergy for the truth of your religion : I beg of you only to examine it to the bottom, to try it, to prove it, and not to hold it fast unless you find it good."*

* Letters to Gibbon,

LET.

LETTER CIV.

IT was a favourite saying with a great emperor of antiquity, Remember how small a part you are of the universal nature; how small a moment of the whole duration is appointed for you; and how small a part you are of the object of universal fate, or Providence. * “Men,” says the same philosopher, “seek retirement in the country, on the sea coasts, or mountains; but this is all, in fact, superfluous; a man may, any hour he pleases, retire into himself; and no where will he find a place of more quiet and leisure, than in his own soul.”

This emperor was a wise man; and his observation is not unlike the ingenious French remark, That those who depend on extrinsic things on the merits of their ancestors for example, may be said to search at the root of the tree for those fruits, which the branches alone ought to produce. Before you get into the practice, however, of retiring into this snug little internal *boudoir*, let me recommend to you not to be

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* Marcus Aurelius.

over-weeningly satisfied with what you have already gained from study, or even from speculation; not to become the determined student, or the blind admirer; and so to substitute the knowledge of books for the inquisitive and animated spirit, in which those very books most probably originated.

Curiosity is, in great and generous minds, the first passion, and the last; and perhaps always predominates in proportion to the strength of the contemplative faculties. He who comprehends all that is before him, and soon exhausts any single subject, is always eager for new inquiries; and as far as the intellectual eye takes in a wider prospect, it must be gratified with variety, by more rapid flights, and bolder excursions; nor perhaps can there be proposed to those, who have been accustomed to the pleasures of inquiry, a more powerful incitement to any undertaking, than the hope of filling their imagination with new images, of clearing their doubts and enlightening their reason. How readily thus are terrors and apprehensions, even in the most timid, to be dispersed by the allurements of expectation, or the enjoyment of hitherto untasted gratification!

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There are, indeed, characters possessing little, if any thing, more than the *vis inertiae*, if I may be allowed the expression, of matter ; who having more power than will, constantly excuse themselves to themselves, by the supposition that the thing is impossible, or truly not worth the trouble. Greatness, however, is nothing more, than an aggregate of little things, or, according to the Arabian proverb, " It is drop added to drop, which constitutes the ocean." All the performances of human art, at which we look with praise or wonder, are instances of this irresistible force of perseverance. To their reason and spirit, therefore, men should add the determination of, persisting in their purposes. He, who would gain a reputation, superior to the names hourly swept away among the refuse of fame, should acquire the art of sapping what he cannot batter, and the habit of vanquishing obstinate resistance by obstinate attacks.*

Time is the wise man's estate: an estate, which will produce nothing without cultivation, but which will always abundantly repay the labours of industry, and satisfy the most extensive desires, if no part of it be suffered to lie waste by negligence. That which is inevitably appropriated

* Dr. Johnson.

appropriated to the demands of nature, or irresistibly engrossed by the tyranny of custom, is, in truth, very considerable. And therefore we should always recollect, that he who runs against time, has an antagonist not subject to casualties.

The certainty that life cannot be long, ought to awaken every man to an active prosecution of whatever he is desirous to perform. At the same time, it is as clear, that no diligence is absolutely certain of success, and that death may intercept the swiftest career. But, he who is even cut off in the execution of an honest undertaking, has at least the honour of falling in his ranks : he has fought the battle, though he has missed the victory.

And here you must pardon me for making an abrupt application ; and as we are drawing to a close, for making that application immediately to yourself. Nor, indeed, is it possible for you to do otherwise ; for do I not know that you have well followed up the plan you had prescribed to yourself, and that you are now on the point of returning to us, as the young bee to the parent hive, loaded with the choicest and most careful selection of the sweets of the various climes

times you have visited. Forgive the enthusiasm, but how often do I not picture you to myself seated upon the summit of one of the highest Alps ; there breathing a serene air, elevated above all low and terrestrial affections ; disengaged almost, as it were, from matter, and for the moment rid of the vexation and torment of human extravagancy. At other times I can fancy you contemplating a *dance of death*, or smiling at the shadowy existence, or boisterous nothingness, of nations. Do you not remember the cottages of the undoubted, and now only real descendants of the old Romans, those masters of the universe, stuck up like bird cages, on Mont Pilate, near Lucerne ? Or the still more illustrious dwellings of the people of Gersau, the smallest republic, without doubt, in the world ? A territory only two leagues long, and one league wide ; and yet possessed of its independent magistrates, its landamman, its council of regency, its courts of justice, and its troops.

But *la danse des morts*, at Basil, must, I am certain, as often as it recurs to your memory, set the whole machine of philosophy at work. But no matter. The origin of this dance was curious. In many churches of France, there was an ancient shew or mimicry, in which all

ranks of life were personated by the ecclesiastics, who all danced together, and disappeared one after another; it was called, *Dance Maccabre*.* This sort of spiritual masquerade was almost universally celebrated in churches. A dance of death seems even to be alluded to in English verse, so early as Pierce Plowman's Visions, written about 1350. "Death came driving after and al to dust pashed kyngs and kaisars, knights and popes."† The dance of death erroneously supposed to have been invented by Holbein, is different from this, though founded in the same idea. It was painted, by Holbein, at Basil, in 1543: but it appeared much earlier. It was in public buildings at Minden, in Westphalia, so early as 1383; at Lubec, in 1463; and at Dresden, in 1534.‡

And are we not, at times, all visionary? No man will be found, in whose mind airy notions do not sometimes tyrannize, and force him to roam beyond the limits of sober probability. He who once resolves upon ideal discoveries, seldom searches long in vain. It is not every one, however, as the poet, who, with "his eye in a fine phrenzy rolling, can glance from heaven

* Supp. Du Cange. † Warton.

‡ Paul Christian Hilscher.

heaven to earth, and from earth to heaven." We are, many of us, too much children of the clod. The ostrich is a bird, but it moves scarcely, if at all, faster than the camel.

We can never, in truth, thoroughly know ourselves, until we put our faculties to some trial. No man can form a just estimate of his own powers by inactive speculations; I would say then, have confidence in the abilities you are master of. For, it may be no less dangerous to claim, on certain occasions, too little, than too much. There is always something captivating in spirit and intrepidity, (propensities, indeed, widely different from presuming impudence) to which we often yield, as to a resistless power; nor can he reasonably expect the confidence of others, who too apparently distrusts himself. * Aristotle, if you remember, names Fortitude the first of the cardinal virtues, as that without which no other virtue can steadily be practised; and he was right. It should, however, have been added, that Prudence and Justice should have a co-ordinate sort of authority; since, without Prudence, Fortitude is mad; and without Justice, it is mischievous.

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* Johnson.

How frequently do we see that man, though, as a rational being, he has thought fit to style himself the lord of the creation, is yet the voluntary slave of prejudice and custom ; the most general opinions being often the most absurd, and the prevailing principles of action the most ridiculous ! Reason, in these instances, may of course be supposed overborne by the importunity of appetite ; the future being universally sacrificed to the present, and hope renounced for possession. But is it not strange, that one man should be immortalised as a God, and another put to death as a felon, for actions which have the same motive, and the same tendency ? The story of a robber or a murderer raises our indignation. This is inevitable : and on some occasions, of dreadful aggravation, we could almost become the executioners. But how is it that we follow a warrior in the path of slaughter with horrid complacency ? and although we hear of his deluging the peaceful fields of industrious simplicity with blood, and leaving them desolate to the widow and the orphan, we yet talk of him with praise ? In fair and honest comparison, there can be no difference between the conqueror and the robber ; or if there be, it certainly may be given in favour of the latter, who may
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be highly criminal towards one or two ; whereas the former, an Alexander, a Cæsar, or a Charles XII. for instance, is the remorseless destroyer of millions. How then would the conqueror's deeds, in equity, stand in the order of retributive estimation ? He must unquestionably be pronounced deserving of punishment, in the proportion of millions to one. Where is the mighty difference between these characters, also, in other respects ? Alexander, we are told, gave proof of his greatness of mind by his contempt of danger. And shall we not say the same of the highwayman, who, unsupported and unaided by a phalanx, ventures to the field alone, and depends upon his own single nerve, in the struggles he is certain to encounter ?

That massacre, with all its direful and concomitant woes, should be deserving of honour, is as inscrutable a mystery as any that has perplexed reason, and as gross an absurdity as any that has disgraced it. It would almost incline one to believe, that whatever interest we may have in knowing ourselves, we yet, perhaps, know as much, if not more, of every thing else, than we do of the phenomena of human nature. Let us acknowledge, at the same time, that
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though ambition, the love of personal eminence, and the desire of fame, have too frequently led to the commission of crimes, yet they have often engaged men in pursuits, which have advantageously drawn forth many of the first qualities of the human character. I am far, therefore, from insisting upon a contempt of glory as an article of wisdom. It is noble to labour well in the public cause. The characteristic of honourable men is, to acquit themselves well in every condition; in the field, in the court, or in the village; in the senate, or in the private retreat. But if they affect any particular station, it ought surely to be that, in which their actions may be rendered most extensively beneficial. It is, if I mistake not, then, an unfailing and universal axiom, that "pride is abject and mean." Nothing in reality can be great which is not right; and nothing which reason condemns, can be suitable to the dignity of the human mind. Thus the utmost excellence at which humanity can arrive, is a constant and determinate pursuit of virtue, without regard to present danger or advantage; an habitual appeal to everlasting justice, and an unwearied elevation of the intellectual eye to the reward which perseverance only can obtain.

Gaming

Gaming with the honest sentiments of the heart, I need not say to you, is worse than gaming, bad as it is, with the money of the pocket. It may make a very bad man of a very good one. Who knows the length to which an habitual depravity may lead? Are the modes of excellence so well settled by time and place, as that men may be heard boasting in one street, what they would anxiously conceal in another? The grounds of scorn and esteem, the topics of praise and satire are varied according to the several virtues or vices, which the course of our lives has disposed us to admire or abhor. But is he who is solicitous for real dignity, to be limited by local reputation? Hypocrisy, for instance, at one end of the town, is very different from hypocrisy at the other. The one kind of hypocrite endeavours to appear more vicious than he really is; the other, to appear more virtuous. But, how contemptible in both cases! that a man shall not only endeavour to deceive the world, but that he shall also endeavour to deceive himself? That he shall strive to believe he is more virtuous than he really is; and either not attend to his vices, or even mistake his vices for virtues?

I have not the presumption, for I am convinced it would be an attempt of desperate hardihood, to venture upon the vast, if not impracticable design of mending the world. Yet, to make the best of the times in which we live ; to fill up the measure of our own actual, particular, and individual duties ; and to take care the age, at least, shall not be the worse for our having been cast into it, seems to be little more than the bare dictate of probity, and not a romantic flight of imaginary perfection.

Fashion makes men, as sovereigns make pieces of money. It gives them what value it pleases ; and in course they are received into currency. But, neither the one nor the other, unless the standard be just, can be deemed of intrinsic estimation. For the wisest purposes, undoubtedly, there has been impressed upon the human mind a taste for variety ; and life would be certainly altogether insipid without it. We all in truth feel, that unalloyed happiness does not dwell upon earth, and that we wander to and fro in a vale of darkness. The human understanding being deluded with shadows, we are often, in attempting even the pursuit of an object of science, unexpectedly stopped in our inquiries ;

ries ; some stern, impervious difficulties present themselves ; and what we ardently followed, we at length find melts into utter illusion.

At the same time, however, let us not deny, that we are happier than we in general fancy ourselves to be. Those men are commonly esteemed the happiest, whose desires are most frequently gratified. But, if in reality a passion for what they desire, and a continued fruition, were alone requisite to happiness, mankind, for the most part, would have reason to complain of their lot. What they call their enjoyments are generally momentary ; and the object of sanguine expectation, when obtained, no longer continues to occupy the mind. Alexander wept when he reached the Indian ocean : a new passion succeeded ; and the imagination, as before, became intent on a distant felicity.

Our memory of the past, and our feeling of the present, we are told, are equally subjects of dislike and pleasure. * But this conclusion, like many others, though drawn from our supposed knowledge of causes, does not correspond with experience. In every corner, in every

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* Maupertuis.

hamlet, in every field, the greater number of persons we meet carry an aspect that is cheerful or thoughtless, indifferent, composed, busy, or animated. The labourer whistles at his team, and the mechanic is at ease in his calling ; the frolicsome and gay feel a series of lively pleasures ; even they, who complain of the miseries of human life, when intent on their argument, escape from their sorrows, and find a tolerable pastime in proving that men are unhappy.*

We abuse ourselves by falling into mistakes in the choice of our objects. We look abroad for a happiness, which is only to be found in the qualities of the heart. We think ourselves dependant upon accidents, and are therefore kept in suspense and solicitude. We think ourselves dependent on the will of other men, and are therefore servile and timid. We act, in short, as if to preserve ourselves were to retain our weakness and perpetuate our sufferings. We charge the ills of a distempered imagination, and a corrupt heart, to the account of our fellow creatures, to whom we refer the pangs of our disappointment or malice ; and while we foster our misery, are surprised that the care of ourselves

* Ferguson:

selves is attended with no better effects. But, he who remembers that he is by nature a rational being and a member of society, that to preserve himself is to preserve his reason, and to preserve the best feelings of his heart, will encounter with none of these inconveniences ; and in the care of himself will find subjects only of satisfaction and triumph.*

Man, on all points, cannot be too rigidly just. He owes it to himself, and he owes it to the world. Admiration is a very short-lived passion, which immediately decays upon growing familiar with its object, unless it be fed by new attractions, and kept alive by a perpetual succession. And thus, on our most pressing occasions, although we are in some degree obliged to lean upon others, we yet in the definitive arrangement must look to reason, and to reason only in ourselves,

There is a term upon which we are not well agreed, I mean luxury. It is sometimes employed to signify a manner of life, which we think necessary to civilization and even to happiness. It is in our panegyric of

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* Ferguson.

polished ages, the parent of arts, the support of commerce, and the minister of national greatness and opulence. It is in our censure of degenerate manners, the source of corruption, and the presage of national declension and ruin. It is, in a word, admired, and it is blamed; it is treated as ornamental and useful; and it is proscribed as a vice.

Every one exclaims against the luxury of the present times, judging more favourably of the past; as if what is luxury at present, would cease to be luxury when it becomes customary. A French writer thus holds every sort of food to be luxury, but raw flesh and acorns; and every sort of covering to be luxury, but bear's skins. According to this definition, the plough, the spade, the loom, are all of them instruments of luxury. Let every man enjoy the privilege of his own thoughts; but in common apprehension, I must think, luxury can only imply a faulty excess. Will you agree with Hollingshed, for example, that drinking glasses are an article of abominable luxury; or that a house, adorned with fine pictures or statues, is an imputation on the proprietor?

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The most violent declaimers against luxury cannot, I should apprehend, affirm, that bread is a pernicious luxury; or that dwelling-houses, more capacious than those originally built, or broad and airy streets, ought to be condemned as luxury, seeing they contribute as much to cheerfulness as to health.

Man consists of soul and body, so intimately connected, that the one cannot be at ease, while the other suffers. In order to have *mens sana in corpore sano*, therefore, it is necessary to study the temperament of both. Bodily health supports the mind; and nothing tends more to support the body than cheerfulness. Much motion and bodily exercise tend to make us robust; but, in the mean time, the mind is starved. Much reading and reflection fortify the mind; but, in the mean time, the body is starved. Nor is this all, excess in either is destruction to both; for exercise, too violent, whether of mind or body, wears the machine. Whatever is innocent, then, and can be attained, is demonstrably of advantage to both body and mind.

Excess punishes itself, as much as it is punished by the condemnation of good sense. In

the grandest palace, the master occupies not a greater space than his meanest domestic ; and he brings to his most sumptuous feast, perhaps, less appetite than any of his guests. But yet, one would not wish that men should be like a flock of sheep, and never emerge from a state, certainly, little better than brutal barbarity. And one thing more, and that of very considerable consequence, is further to be recollected, that during all the cry against refinement of manners, it is the poor who practise the arts, and the rich who pay for them.

The casuist, for the most part, considers the practice of his own age and condition as a standard for mankind. If in one age or condition, he condemn the use of a coach ; in another he would have no less censured the wearing of shoes. The modes of youth are a subject of censure to the old ; and the modes of the last age, in their turn, are matter of ridicule to the flippant and the young. Of this there is not always a better account to be given, than that the old are disposed to be severe, and the young to be merry. And thus, whether a man sleep on a bed of straw, or tumble on a bed of down ; tread upon a carpet, or plant his foot on the ground ; while the mind either retains, or has lost its penetration, and

and its vigour, and the heart its affection to mankind, it is in vain to look in these accidental circumstances for the distinctions of virtue and vice. The polished citizen ought not to be taxed with weakness for wearing a fur, in which, perhaps, some savage was dressed before him. Vanity is not distinguished by any species of dress. It is betrayed by the Indian in the phantastic assortment of his plumes, his shells, and his beads. Its projects in the woods, and in the town, are the same. In the one it seeks, with the visage bedaubed, tatowed, and with teeth artificially stained, for that admiration, which it courts, in the other, with a gilded equipage, and liveries of state.

Nothing, therefore, is more necessary, to root out any perverseness in our opinions, than mixing with persons of countries, ages, and occupations, different from our own. And the necessity of this free conversation, to open and improve the mind, is most evident from the consequences which always follow a neglect of it. The prejudiced and intemperate partizan, who has not been weaned from his illiberal attachment to particular principles, is always weak enough to imagine every man of a different way
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of thinking a blockhead, a fool, or a knave. To what other cause is it that we owe the rough country squire, whose ideas are wholly bent on guns, horses, and game, and who has every thing about him of a piece with his diversions? Look at him at home. His hall must be adorned with antelope's heads, instead of busts and marbles; and in the room of good pictures, you must have prints of the most famous hunters and racers. All his doors must open and shut with the feet of animals; and even the buttons of his clothes must be impressed with the figures of dogs, foxes, and stags,

To this absurd practice of cultivating only one set of ideas, and shutting ourselves out, as it were, from any intercourse with the rest of the world, is owing that narrowness of mind, which has infected the conversation of certain classes, with all the insipidity of common place expressions; made roughness the characteristic of this or that order of society, and produced the most fatal consequences in politics and religion. It is not, however, impossible to see the profound philosopher, and the accomplished man, step from his study, where he has passed days and nights in the deepest contemplation, to assume

sume an active part in the government of his country. This is a sight worthy to be admired, and is in every sense deserving of imitation.

The progress of the human mind ; the variety of knowledge accumulated by industry ; the sources whence science hath probably originated ; inquiries concerning these, surely, are objects of as beneficial, and as laudable pursuit, as the sports of the field, or the sauntering up and down in the listlessness of perpetual *ennui*. Not that man, in any situation, should be debarred from the delights of recreation. Amusement is one of the prime ingredients of human felicity. At the same time, in amusements it cannot be denied, there are both distinctions and degrees.

Ponderous politics are the daily, the almost necessary food of Englishmen. We claim, in imagination, to hold the balance of the world. Here, say we to one nation, stop your vast conquests ; here, say we to another, give up your fierce ravages. But should not many of us, at least, be equally wise, were we less mindful of others, and a little more attentive to ourselves ? As one, however, belonging to certainly not the least celebrated of the nations of the earth, and as a citizen of one of the highest orders of rank in the

the community, you are now shortly to take an active part in the service of your country. Among the variously regulated people of Europe, you have found an infinite deal to be admired. You have not visited them, to contemplate alone, or superciliously to make merry with customs which may have been new to you, but you have studied them for your instruction. You have benefited by their knowledge and improvements. And, in short, you have taught your mind to perceive that the spirit of science, and the energy of virtue, are in no manner confined to any particular place or time,

The real friend of man never calculates national happiness from the exteriors of a few. He judges from the general and internal welfare of the many. For though the rich man may appear to dissipate his days in enviable felicity; it yet is not to be concluded, that the more numerous, and the more valuable part of the society is in a situation of comfort and content. The contrary is too frequently the case: and it is verified by the history of all ages, and all nations, that where the greatest fortunes have been observed, there have always been traced the greatest indigence; and that where the rich have
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shewn themselves in the greatest abundance, there have invariably been found the greatest instances of poverty and wretchedness.

The extremes of wealth and want unavoidably occasion misery. A people may be happy, where there are no great riches, nor an abundance even of what we call comforts. But when one sees, as in too many parts of the world, an excess of riches; palaces of marble, costly equipages, superb cabinets of superfluities; and at the same time the lower orders in rags, starving, diseased, and almost without a hovel to shelter their defenceless heads, here, he must say, there is misery; and here, humanity, consequently, would call for a reform. For tell me, is it possible, that the oppressed peasantry, for instance, of some parts of Germany, of Denmark and of Russia, can be said to be in the condition they ought to be? Or when ranging through the beautiful palaces of Genoa; and enchanted, as it were, by the magnificence of La Strada Nuova, and La Strada Balbi; and, at the same time, stunned by the clamours of loathsome beggars, and want in its most hideous forms; say, can the heart here assent to the enormous disproportion between the affluent and the poor?

Rome

Rome, likewise, is a most interesting city, whether classically or clerically considered. But would it teem with less glory, were it a little more productive of industry and virtue? Ability and wisdom, all will acknowledge, have not abandoned Italy. Nor are statues, columns, pictures, and mosaics, the only valuable things remaining to the mistress of the world. In this one city, however, (and its population is scarcely a sixth of either London or Paris) there are more than seven hundred asylums. And in the kingdom of Naples, I have been confidently assured, and that from an authority I cannot doubt, that at least five thousand assassinations are annually committed.

It is unaccountable, whence stabbing should thus characteristically appertain to this country of Italy. Nor do I particularly speak of it as it is at present, but as it has always been. From the earliest periods of the Roman history, such bloody footsteps are to be traced. Roman writers, or writers dependent upon Roman liberality, have not given us all the truth upon the subject. Nor would a modern Italian annalist venture to consign the names of his contemporaries to posterity as assassins. But, did not Romulus murder

der his brother Remus ? And did not the senate murder Romulus ? From Virginia, the Gracchi, the murders of Sylla, and various other massacres, to the assassination of Cæsar, the proscriptions of the Augustan triumvirate, and the almost endless list of atrocities of the emperors and the generals, the bloody knife as decidedly appears to have been an appénage of the imperial city, as the eagle or the fasces.

Nor are many others of the Appennine provinces, at all behind hand with their ancestors. The Tuscans, however, are not to be included in this description. No people on earth are better disposed than the Tuscans ; they are honest, and they are unaddicted to revenge. The late Grand Duke, Leopold II. found the means of rectifying the prevalency of certain disorderly practices which his subjects had in common with their neighbours, and that too without having recourse to the extraordinary system of his mother Maria Theresa, who at one time, at Vienna, established *un Tribunal Special de Chasteté*. In the Papal, and in the Neapolitan dominions, there is a blind confidence in the externals of religion. There unjust men, even the most guilty wretches, dare flatter themselves in the
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the hope, that they can corrupt their God by presents, and that they can deceive him by the semblance of piety. Nor is this superstition likely to be soon eradicated. *Ex-votos*, and costly gifts, are readily dealt out; nor are they attended with such personal difficulty, as the undeviating practice of real virtues.

Recollect the *Tabulæ Votivæ* of the Pagan Romans, on which were represented the evil, the danger, or the sickness to which the suppliant had been exposed. Horace, in particular, gives a shipwrecked mariner very busily at work on the subject of his escape. Yet is there, or can there be, in the whole catalogue of absurdities, any thing so absurd as that extravagancy, which would make a bargain with the Almighty? But *Æneas Silvius*, afterward Pope Paul II. long ago observed on this head, that “there was nothing to be obtained from the court of Rome, but by the force of money. Even the ceremony of consecration, and the gifts of the Holy Ghost, says he, are sold; and the remission of sins is bestowed only on those who can pay for it.”

It is certain, that, in almost every religion, many of the votaries, perhaps the greater number,

ber, will still seek the divine favour, not by virtue and good morals, which alone can be acceptable to a perfect Being, but either by frivolous observances, by intemperate zeal, by rapturous extacies, or by the belief of mysterious and absurd opinions. Thus, when the old Romans, says Hume, were attacked with a pestilence, they never ascribed their sufferings to their vices, or dreamed of repentance or amendment. They never reflected, that they were the general robbers of the world, whose ambition and avarice made desolate the earth, and reduced opulent nations to want and beggary. They only created a dictator, in order to drive a nail into a door; and by that means they thought they had sufficiently appeased their incensed Deity.*

In the fourteenth century of our Christian æra, gross ignorance, and wretched superstition, prevailed to such a degree, that people reckoned themselves secure of salvation, if, at the day of judgment, they could shew any connection whatever with monks. Many, hence, at the point of death, made it their last request, to be admitted only into the mendicant order, or to be interred in their burial-place. And thus, a croisade, pleasantly observes an ingenious writer, was a

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* Nat. Hist. of Religion.

South-Sea project of former times. By the latter, men hoped to gain riches without industry; by the former, they hoped to gain heaven without repentance, amendment of life, or sanctity of manners.*

The weak and extravagant belief in tutelar divinities under Christianity, is, at the same time, no less impious, than it is contradictory to the gospel. The Pope beatifies, and the Pope canonizes, as the Heathen conferred an apotheosis. Roman Catholics, indeed, do not adopt the Israelitish opinion, that the Supreme Being is their tutelar divinity. They hold, however, that there are divine persons subordinate to the Almighty, who take under their care nations, families, and even individuals. And this opinion, which flatters self-love, took root in the fifth century; when the want of the passions, rather than their restraint, was regarded as the best title to an heavenly election.

Images were originally used for the sole purpose of animating devotion. The emperor Julian, in an epistle to Theodore concerning the images of the gods, particularly says, "We believe not that these images are gods;

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• Sir David Dalrymple.

we only use them in worshipping the gods." And this was well. The emperor Julian, as a Heathen, was licensed to deify, or otherwise, as best suited his fancy. But to see a rational being, and in the pale of Christianity, bowing to a saint supposed in heaven, who scarce ever deserved a place on earth, is so groveling, and so contemptible, that it would rouse even the most placid mind to indignation.

Louis XI. of France, sensible of the approach of death, sent for an hermit of Calabria, named Francisco Martarillo, and, throwing himself at the hermit's feet in a flood of tears, entreated him to intercede with God that his life might be prolonged : as if the voice of a Calabrian friar, says Voltaire, could alter the course of Providence, by preserving a weak and perverse soul in a worn-out body. Nor is it any apology, that the gods of antiquity are still said to have been more notoriously mercenary. Homer, I am not ignorant, makes them so in the extreme. Even the multitude, in his days, had no difficulty in being persuaded, that the immortals could eat, drink, and sleep as well as themselves. And hence Augustus, having twice lost his fleet by storm, forbade Neptune to be carried in procession along with the other gods, imagining he

had thus avenged himself, by neglecting the favourite statue in which, the numen of the divinity resided. Now, is not this precisely the way, in which the Portuguese use the image of St. Anthony of Padua? "When we were in Portugal," says Mr. Brydone, "the people of Castelbranco were so enraged at St. Antonio, for suffering the Spaniards to plunder the town, contrary, as they affirmed, to his express agreement with them, that they broke many of his statues to pieces; and, from one that had been more revered than the rest, they took the head off, and in its stead placed one of St. Francis. Even the great St. Januarius himself was in imminent danger during the last famine at Naples. The Neapolitans loaded him with abuse and invective; and declared point-blank, that, if he did not procure them corn by such a time, he should be no longer their saint."

But every hole and corner in the countries neighbouring to that in which you are, teems with saints and saintesses. And how can it well be otherwise? We Ultramontani, as we are contemptuously called, cannot, for instance, shut our eyes to the fact, that of forty thousand houses said to be in Rome, thirty thousand belong

long to the clergy alone; their relatives and dependents: that, in Italy, there are two hundred and seventy-three bishoprics and rich livings; and, in the imperial city itself, upwards of eight thousand priests: that Naples, besides twenty-two archbishoprics, has one hundred and sixteen bishops, and very nearly four-fifths of the wealth of the kingdom in the hands of the clergy: and that, on the other side of the Mediterranean, independent of the enormous church establishments of Spain, the Portuguese, who have not two millions of inhabitants in their whole dominions, have yet at least nine hundred convents.

Even so late as the year 1771, a conspiracy was formed against one of the most respectable sovereigns in Europe, the reigning king of Poland, Stanislaus Augustus. Bigotry doomed him to assassination. He was accordingly treacherously set upon, overpowered, and dragged by miscreants into a forest in the neighbourhood of Warsaw. Remorse, however, happily springing in the breasts of one or two of the assassins, he was saved. But that which leads me to mention this fact, but which, at the same time, is scarcely credible, is, that the Pope's nuncio in Poland, (I give you my authority) not only ap-

proved of the intended murder, but, animated with a zeal, purely diabolical, against a monarch, whose only crime was toleration and liberality, blessed and sanctified the arms, with which the assassination was to have been perpetrated.*

I am not afraid to say it, therefore, because I am not actuated by any prejudiced, or any sectarian principle, that, in general, throughout most of the southern Roman-Catholic countries of Europe, provided the body be, at stated times, present in the church, the mind may, with impunity, be employed any where else. "The people assist," says one of their own writers, "sans aucune autre signe de piété, qu'un attention curieuse aux mouvemens du prêtre, et pour se frapper la poitrine à l'instant de l'élévation, lorsqu'ils entendent la clochette. Le pied, une fois hors de l'église, le Chrétien disparaît; il ne reste plus que l'homme sujet à mille passions."†

The wiser part of the community, at the same time, (and the number is far from inconsiderable) have no hesitation in declaring, that the accusation is too true; and
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* Wrexall: Coxe.

† L'Abbe Richard.

in lamenting, that plenary indulgence should be so easily found for past guilt, and even prospective indemnity for crimes, of which the wicked may in future be guilty.

LETTER CV.

IT is a grateful task, on all occasions, to rescue real worth from the obloquy of unmerited opprobrium. The clergy, as I have often been happy to express, had an undoubted and a superior credit in the most difficult moments of the modern history of Europe. When they had established their influence in the western parts, for instance, they had the singular merit of endeavouring every where to repress the disorder and injustice arising from the anarchy of the feudal times. The weak and defenceless, who met with insult and oppression, from every other quarter, found protection from the church; and widows and orphans, and all persons in distress, *personæ miserabiles*, who had been banished from the barbarous tribunal of the lay judges, found a welcome reception in the spiritual courts, where their causes were commonly examined with candour, and determined with impartiality.

Military

Military barons, invested with civil jurisdiction, paid little attention to the claims of any person, from whose future services they could derive no benefit, or from whose resentment they had nothing to fear. To the honour of the clergy, then, it must be remembered, that they were the friends of order and regular government; that if they laboured to rear a system of ecclesiastical despotism, their authority was generally employed in maintaining the rules of justice; and that they discovered an uniform inclination to protect the weak and defenceless against that violence and oppression, which was too much countenanced by such of the laity as were possessed of opulence and power. From this circumstance, accordingly, the extension of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction was highly acceptable to the people, and notwithstanding the pernicious consequences, which they ultimately tended to produce, were, in the mean time, of great advantage to the lower orders of men, if not of general benefit to the community.*

The church is, by some, condemned on account of the canon law. And if we consider it politically, and view it either as a system framed on purpose to assist the clergy in usurping power

power and jurisdiction, no less repugnant to the nature of their functions, than inconsistent with the order of government; or as the chief instrument in establishing the dominion of the Pope, which shook the thrones, and endangered the liberties of every kingdom in Europe; we must pronounce it one of the most formidable engines ever formed against the happiness of civil society. But if we contemplate it as a code of laws, respecting the rights and privileges of individuals, and attend only to the civil effects of its decisions concerning these, it will appear in a different, and much more favourable light.*

In ages of ignorance and credulity, the ministers of religion every where are objects of superstitious veneration. Nor is it in such times difficult for a body, so formed, to plead and obtain an almost total exemption from the authority of civil judges, and to establish courts, in which every question, relating to their own character, or their function, shall ultimately be tried. This privilege, the Christian ministry extended so much, that the greater part of those affairs, which gave rise to contest and litigation, was drawn under the cognizance of the spiritual courts. Nor is it strange, that this

this was the case. That scanty portion of science which served to guide men in the ages of darkness, was wholly engrossed by the clergy. They, alone, were accustomed to read, to enquire, and to reason. The barons terminated their difference by the sword. But by the canon law, every matter was subjected to the decision of the laws. By the one, chance and force were left to be arbiters of right and wrong, of truth and falsehood. The other passed judgment by the maxims of equity, and the testimony of witnesses.

In the earliest ages of the church I do not find that the clergy pretended to claim exemption from the civil jurisdiction. On the contrary, even in the ninth and tenth centuries, causes of the greatest importance relative to ecclesiastics, were still determined by civil judges.* This privilege then, like their other usurpations, was gained slowly. Those doctrines in the code of the canon law, which are most favourable to the power of the clergy, were founded in superstition, and supported by imposture. They began to be compiled, about the beginning of the ninth century; and it was above two centuries after this, before any collections were made of those customs

* Antiq. Ital. vol. v. dissert. 70.

customs, which were the rule of judgments, in the courts of the barons.* And yet, the whole spirit of ecclesiastical jurisprudence was adverse to those sanguinary customs, which were destructive of justice, I mean, the trial by combat.

So entirely, indeed, was this felt, that it was deemed an high privilege to be subject to ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Among the many immunities by which men were allured to engage in the dangerous experiments, for the recovery of the holy land, one of the most considerable was, declaring such as took the cross, to be subject only to the spiritual courts. The copy of Justinian's Pandects was not discovered at Amalphi in Italy, till the middle of the twelfth century; and before the close of it the feudal law was enlarged and methodized. In no country of Europe, however, was there at that time any collection of customs; nor had any attempt been made to render law fixed. The first undertaking of the kind was by Glanville, Lord Chief Justice of England, composed about the year 1181.† The clergy, therefore, we see, anticipated one of the noblest monuments of the wisdom of the Romans, their system of jurisprudence.—

They

* Mem. de l'Acad. des Inscrip. † Robertson.

They taught men how to think ; and exercised a wholesome coercion in action. It deserves to be mentioned further, in honour of the clergy, that it appears probable, from several circumstances, that the modern profession of the law is of ecclesiastical origin. The coif is agreed to be the invention of the clergy, to disguise their tonsure when prohibited to practise in the temporal courts. The bands, the habits, and the general tenor of the dress, though till the time of Charles II. they varied much, appear to proclaim the same original. The old books seem to have almost included Westminster Hall itself within the pale of the church. For instance, when they caution pleaders against too nice and technical conclusions in forming issues, they do it, " because the lay people," meaning the jury, " will not understand it." And we are told, that the Lord Chancellor was, for a long time, the King's chief chaplain, and had the superior care of his chapel as well as of his chancery.* Also, the general and extended denomination of clerks given to the deputies in law offices, and thence, by degrees, to all offices whatever, is plainly owing to the circumstance of our law offices having been originally, and for a long time, filled by some of the clergy. That in particular, the six
clerks

* Madox.

clerks in chancery were of the clergy, is acknowledged on all hands; and it appears from the parliament rolls, (4th of Edward III.) that the Lord Chancellor used to give the benefices under a certain value, the patronage whereof is in the crown, "to the clerks in chancery who had long laboured in that place." And hence, though nearly on the eve of the Reformation, it was enacted they might marry; (statute of Henry VIII.) because, though the office was then chiefly filled by laymen, yet the clergy were not disabled from holding these offices, any more than the highest office in chancery. These and other particulars in favour of the clergy, which history furnishes, should prevent us, even at the present moment, from being too hasty in our conclusions against this order of men.—The habitudes of education determine most things. But, a people well trained, are, in regard to temporal felicity, you will find, but very little clogged even by the most glaring superstition. It must be confessed, the extreme number of fasts, in Roman Catholic countries, together with priestly influence, auricular interference, and a multitude of other unwholesome bars, may render Roman Catholics, in the eye of speculative philosophy, less industrious and less active, than the followers of the reformed church are acknowledged to be.

But, the example of France, of Flanders, of the King of Sardinia's dominions, of Lombardy, of Tuscany, and of various parts of Germany, shew that the religion of Rome, when states are well governed, does not in any material degree, smother the grand principles of industry. No countries are better cultivated than these are. The Jesuits, it is true, prevailed upon Louis XIV. to revoke the edict of Nantz; but good sense afterwards made Louis XVI. revoke the revocation. Again, observe some of the very countries in which the reformed religion is established. I do not speak now of our own; for of that I shall have occasion to say a word or two presently. Frederic II. of Prussia, certainly, and much to his honour, erected five or six hundred villages. And the provinces of Holland, where there is neither wood for ships, nor stones for houses, have atchieved wonders.

But, have you not stumbled at times upon whole kingdoms, as I may say, where Calvinists have hated Lutherans; where Lutherans have hated Calvinists; and where both one and the other would, in case of exigency, have rather preferred Roman Catholics or Infidels? The peasantry of Denmark, though Protestants, are still, you will remember, little better than Serfs.

They

They are subject to the Corvees. They cannot possess any real property. They dare not quit the place of their nativity without leave. Their chain, as they have become emancipated in religion, has become even more grievous in society. No lot can be more degrading.

Venice, Genoa, and Tuscany, were enlightened likewise, long before Luther shewed himself in Saxony. In Poland, until very lately, all was disgraceful. The great and the little nobles were absolute over the laborious poor. Even though they murdered them, they were not seriously amenable to law, unless two gentlemen and four witnesses could prove, on oath, they were absolutely evidences of the fact. Yet, to his immortal honour, the Great Chancellor *Zamoyski*, in 1760, began on his own estates, the glorious work of manumission. The Vice-Chancellor of Lithuania, *Chreptowitz*, and the *Abbe Brysotoski*, soon followed his great example. The sovereign, Stanislaus Augustus himself, approved and encouraged this best movement of humanity. He even did more; he conceived the plan, and, in the year 1791, he adopted a constitution which promised to his subjects the inestimable blessings of freedom. And, though the actual enjoyment of these blessings has been since interrupted, by the oppressive and cruel interference

reference of neighbouring powers, it should be remembered, that the monarch and the people, by whom this noble effort was made, were Roman Catholics.

In Russia, where the savage boor, still, for his own personal gratification, marries his infant son to a grown-up woman, I will acknowledge, that slavery is carried to an enormous excess. The nobles are seen even to refine upon what the accomplished Atticus did not blush at, which was, to train his slaves to various occupations, and to accumulate wealth and philosophic indulgence by the sweat of their devoted brows. The great men of Russia, indeed, cannot inflict the knout; but they can arbitrarily inflict every other kind of punishment. They can imprison; they can exercise the utmost severity of corporal chastisement. They can, at their will, banish their vassals to Siberia. And yet Catherine, the present great Empress of that unmeasurable dominion, has put the courts of justice on the best footing in Russia: she has settled physicians and surgeons in every part: she has established free seminaries of learning for the indigent: she has founded colleges for the more affluent: she has liberated the serfs of the crown: she has established grand agricultural

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societies, on the most useful theoretic and practical plans : and she has extended her fostering care even to infants yet unborn.

Humanity, in all this, speaks forcibly. The great Frederic was certainly right when he received all religions into Prussia, as they presented themselves to him : Jews, who declare loudly the Messiah is not come ; Roman Catholics, who eat him every day ; Protestants, who declare the Pope to be the animal of the apocalypse, and the *meretrix Babylonica* ; Greeks, who say there is no Trinity ; Turks, who contend that Mahommed was as great a prophet as Christ ; and the innumerable train of Infidels, who will neither have prophets, altars, nor religion. And it is an opinion assuredly very easily acquiesced in, that he who should have first ventured to talk in such a society of an *auto da fe*, would be the first to have been roasted by the community at large.

But apart from the more considerable German dominions, what are, in general, better managed than the smaller, and especially the ecclesiastical dominions ? Slavery is unknown in all these. The vexations of multiplied and undefined signorial tyranny are
unfelt ;

unfelt; a tyranny springing from at least two thousand independent and arbitrary authorities. The imposts and taxes are very far from being exorbitant. The lord's children are not provided for by the scanty earnings of the industrious and hard-working labourer, who is frequently obliged to snatch the morsel of bread from the mouths of his own infants, that the young lords and ladies may be befittingly endowed. The ecclesiastical sovereigns, in short, do not pride themselves in large standing armies; much less do they barter the blood of their subjects.

But, while Protestants declaim against the absurd, and undoubtedly, in many instances, highly culpable practices of the Roman Catholic church, they seem entirely to forget the near relation they bear themselves to this guilt, whatever it may be. Were not all our own immediate fathers Roman Catholics, and that a very few years ago? "It must be painful to you," said a Protestant prince to a Roman Catholic in his last moments, "to have the idea of your remains being mixed with those, whom you have so long been led to consider as heretics." "Sire," said the sick man, "only let them dig my grave a few feet deeper than ordi-

nary, and then I shall be certain of falling in with those of my own persuasion."

Many of the Protestant communities, we, for example, of the British islands, are not entirely free from every species of reproach; for, in politics, are we not liable to have retorted upon us the various and sanguinary interruptions in the administration of our government? Had we not seven palpable deviations from the hereditary succession of the Crown previous to the Revolution? Were not there the public execution of one king, and the banishment of another, a little before that period; and the privation and exile of a whole race of kings immediately afterward?

In religion, also, had we not four radical and complete changes, in not only the exterior, but in the essence of our church discipline, in three successive reigns;—Popish, under Harry, the first defender of the Roman faith; and then Protestant, under the same Harry, the first defender of the Protestant faith: violently Popish again, under his daughter Mary; and once more Protestant, under his daughter Elizabeth: Presbyterian, under Oliver Cromwell and the Commonwealth; Episcopal, at the Restoration; high-church,

church, under Ann; low-church, under the first George; and, at this very moment, separated into as many sects as there are shades of opinion between the wide extremes of bigotry and infidelity ?*

As a young man, you will, no doubt, allow, that it is not always in one's power either to love or let it alone; for, like fire, love subsists in motion. When it ceases to hope and fear, it ceases to exist. And hence the reason why, in unimpassioned deduction, a lover cannot, with any sort of justice, complain of the inconstancy of his mistress, nor she of the fickleness of her swain. Every man, in like manner, is impelled, as far as his abilities go, to a judgment for himself, in matters of religion. We all admit of human fallibility, for we cannot deny it: and, therefore, there can be no obligation, or reason, why any particular person should be bound by the opinions of any particular sect.

There are, and have been, and will be to eternity, various and opposite sentiments on a question, which, above all others, is most interesting to every man. And the partizans of either party will ever pretend to have the argu-

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• Sir Brooke Boothby.

ment in their favour. Even among the most learned, and the most rigidly just and pure-hearted, we often see, that neither knowledge, nor virtue, is an absolute security against error. Religion, in reality, cannot be more national than the intellectual faculty and the energies of conscience. Some truths, it is certain, may be national; but others must be universal. For God never appointed true religion to lend forms and tints to any peculiar associations: he placed it in the centre of the universe, to be the luminary of union, by the exercise of general benevolence.

The direful spirit of fanaticism is happily leaving the earth. Those begin to blush, who formerly had no zeal so strong as that of persecution. They now even begin to feel, that tolerance is not a deadly sin—a conspiracy against God and nature. St. Bernard's words come to be understood, "*Fides suadenda, non imperanda.*" But could you have supposed, that the losses occasioned to the human species, from the first sanguinary executions of the Hebrews, to the perfidious massacres of St. Bartholomew and Ireland, within the pale of Judaism and Christianity alone, there could from history be traced to have been at least thirty millions

lions of men? Or, could you ever have conceived it possible, that, after the massacre of St. Bartholomew, a medal should have been struck with this inscription; “*Pietas armavit justitiam?*” That it should be recorded, that “*un arret du mois de Juillet 1562, permet de tuer les Huguenots partout ou on les trouvera; etordonnoit, que cet arret seroit lu tous les dimanches au prône de chaque paroisse?*” Or, what is still more abominable, that Pope Gregory the Thirteenth should, for the murder of from seventy to an hundred thousand of his fellow-creatures, on the day of St. Bartholomew, have made a solemn procession to St. Peter’s, and placed a picture of the subject in the Vatican, with this inscription, “*Pontifex collegiū necem probat?*”†

To admit general principles in theory, and to restrict them in practice, is, to a rational mind, the basest logic. Intolerance, that pretends to reason, is, worse than enthusiasm, which persecutes from impulse. Peter, John, and Paul, are men; you and I are men; and so is the Jew, and so is the Mahomedan. As well, then, may you give reason to man, and brand him for a fool, because he reasons, as

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* Philosophie de la Nature.

† Bayle.

brand with infamy the man who judges for himself in religion. The absurdity is, in truth, too glaring ; and yet almost all Christians are guilty of it. We all strive to fasten an opprobrium upon those who think differently from ourselves ; and thus prejudice becomes an over-match for principle.*

In every quarter our ears are dinned with the cry of impiety. In Asia, the Christian is impious ; in Europe, the Mussulman ; in London, the Papist ; in Rome, the Calvinist : nay, almost every street has its peculiar sanctity and pretension. How is this ? Is the whole world impious ? or is there any such thing as impiety ? I am afraid this mutual reproach is little better than satire in self-applause : and though the paradox is not in all cases just, we may venture to believe, that those who have the best laws have often the most need of them.

The advocate for real Christianity has nothing to do with the peculiar tenets of Luther, Calvin, or Bellarmine, or with any other system which is likely to be tinctured with human infirmity : his business is, to vindicate the truth as it is in the gospel. Human knowledge, as human

* Berrington.

human nature, he knows, is to be pruned according to method and rule. As the world advances, reason at all times gains ground upon imagination; the understanding becomes more exercised; fewer objects occur that are new and surprising; men apply to trace the causes of things; and they correct and refine one another. And thus, in the present age, thanks to the Author of all goodness, we are beginning to make amends for former negligence. The curiosity of the moralist is connected with taste and genius; and his researches tend to display the progress of human manners, and to illustrate the history of society.

The religious establishment, of any country, so far as it is settled by human laws, and with respect to external rites and worldly emolument, is liable to change, as much as any civil appointments whatever. So far was Locke from thinking the church interwoven with the state, that he held the former to be absolutely separate and distinct from the latter. "The boundaries, on both sides," says he, "are fixed and immoveable." And he jumbles heaven and earth together, things most remote and opposite, who mixes two societies which
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are, in their original, end, business, and every thing, perfectly distinct, and infinitely different from each other.”*

A comprehensive national religion, thus guarded by articles of peace and conformity, together with a complete toleration of all dissenters from the established church, without any other limitation or exception than what arises from the conjunction of dangerous political dispositions with certain religious tenets, appears to be not only the most just and liberal, but the wisest and safest system which a state can adopt. It unites the several perfections which a religious constitution ought to aim at, liberty of conscience, with means of instruction; the progress of truth, with the peace of society; the right of private judgment, with the care of the public safety.”†

The rulers of a people have a right to chuse a religion; and to endow it; but they have no right to decide on articles of faith, to impose creeds, and to declare those who differ from their orthodoxy, heretics and schismatics, who are to be repressed by pains and penalties. Conscience, says the venerable Lord Mansfield,

* First Letter on Toleration. † Archdeacon Paley.

field, is not controulable by human reason, nor amenable to human tribunals. "It is absurd that things should be enjoined by laws, which are not in men's power to perform."* To impose an implicit faith, therefore, is detestable. The conclusions of the understanding, when not embodied in actions, are beyond the limits of temporal jurisdiction.

The Roman Catholic, who believes that to be really the body of Christ, which another calls bread, does no injury thereby to his neighbour, Papists and Protestants, accordingly, can live very comfortably together, if they be only let alone. But penal laws, for the direction of faith and conscience, can affect no one living, except honest men. They can never hurt those who pay no regard either to reason or to conscience. Why, therefore, should the sacramental test in England be continued against conscientious Christian dissenters, which does not exclude free-thinkers, and men, in short, indifferent to all religious systems; which did not even prevent Lord Bolingbroke from being Secretary of State?

In

* Locke.

In America; the sixth article of the union provides, "That no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the united states." The national assembly of France has also, with great good sense, and commendable liberality, admitted Christians of all denominations to offices, if they be not otherwise disqualified. The empress of Russia, the late king of Prussia, the emperor of Germany, the king of Sweden, and the king and the republic of Poland, have all granted toleration, and leave the punishment of heresy and schism to the care of heaven alone. Why is it not so with us?

St. Chrysostom said, he endeavoured, according to the precepts of the gospel, to love his enemies; but he could not avoid indulging himself with the privilege of hating the enemies of God and the church. Toleration is not, surely, the opposite of intolerance; it is, in reality, its counterfeit. Both are despotisms; the one assumes to itself the right of withholding the liberty of conscience, and the other of granting it. The one is the pope, armed with fire and faggot; and the other is the pope, selling or granting indulgencies. The former is
church

church and state, and the latter is church and traffic.*

Man worships not himself, but his Maker; and the liberty of conscience which he claims, is not for the service of himself, but of his God. In this case, therefore, we must necessarily have the associated ideas of two beings; the mortal, who renders the worship, and the immortal being who is worshipped. Toleration places itself not between man and man; nor between church and church; nor between one denomination of religion and another; but between God and man, between the being who worships, and the being who is worshipped. And by the same act of assumed authority, by which it tolerates man to pay his worship, it presumptuously and blasphemously sets itself up to tolerate the Almighty to receive it.

Were a bill now to be brought into parliament, entitled, "An act to tolerate or grant liberty to the Almighty to receive the worship of a Jew or a Turk," or "to prohibit the Almighty from receiving it—" would not all men startle, and call it blasphemy? There would, undoubtedly, be an uproar. Who then art thou, vain dust, and ashes!

• Sir Brooke Boothby.

ashes! by whatever name thou art called, whether a king, a bishop, a church, a state, a parliament, or any thing else, that obtrudest thine insignificance between the soul of man and its Maker? Mind thine own concerns. If he believe not as thou believest, it is a proof that thou believest not as he believeth; and there is no earthly power can determine between you.*

With respect to what are called denominations, therefore, of religion, if every one be left to judge of his own religion, there is no such thing as a religion that is wrong. But if men are to judge of each other's religion, there is no such thing as a religion that is right; and therefore all the world are right, or all the world are wrong.† No man, or body of men, consequently, can, under any pretence whatsoever, assume the power of governing, or forcing the belief, the thoughts, the reason of others, without impiously and foolishly arrogating the power of God. Religion, as a rule of faith, by which we are to be saved or condemned in another life, must be the exclusive private concern of the individual, in which every man has an indisputable right to follow the light of his own reason, and to reject all authority founded on the

* Sir Brooke Boothby.

† Paine.

the reason of others. Those, accordingly, who denounce to us damnation, as the consequence of error in faith, and those who would force us to hazard our immortal souls, upon their judgments, who have no concern in the matter, contrary to our own reason, who have so deep an interest in it, are the most execrable of all tyrants.

Mankind have groaned, even in the church of Christ, for more than a thousand years, under a fatal confederation between civil and ecclesiastical power. By this contract for the bodies and souls of men, the mind is first to be enslaved, and then the body delivered over to the secular arm, with its active principle, the spring of all its virtues and faculties, bound up in chains. From this complicated tyranny, even death is no refuge. Its power, in papal kingdoms more especially, extends into the reign of darkness ; the miserable mortal, who has not obeyed its ordinances here, who does not go to the grave clothed in the San Benito of their inquisition, and carry in his hand the passport of absolution, is handed over to the agents of the hierarchy in another world, to the discipline of eternal torments. But even our own present mixture of religion with politics ;

tics, our religious tests, and parliamentary religions, would, I suspect, appear somewhat ludicrous to a person who could contemplate them unbiassed by habit and custom. Is it not a curious idea, for instance, that if a Solon, or a Socrates, were to rise up among us, the one could not sit for a Cornish borough, nor the other execute the office of justice of peace; that Epaminondas could not command a troop of horse; or Themistocles be made a post-captain, till they had made themselves masters of the thirty-nine articles previously to the taking the sacramental test? *

But it is argued (and you will pardon me for detaining you for a moment longer at home) that if regard be due to the tender consciences of dissenters, still more is owing to the opinions of the members of the church of England, who would think the church in danger from innovation. That certain dissenters have talked idly, and even alarmingly, of laying trains to blow up episcopacy altogether, I will acknowledge; as also, that some have even been so intemperate, and have gone so far, as to make sober minded men doubtful of their individual disposition towards that toleration, which they for themselves have so loudly demanded.

But

* Sir Brooke Boothby.

But all, believe me, are not so. And, perhaps, those who have most wantoned in the poetic wilds of imagery have meant nothing more than metaphorical combustibles; arguments, to blow up what they held to be inveterate errors and pernicious principles; and to do no injury but to what they conceived unjust proscriptions. Many of the dissenters from the established religion of our country, be assured, are as wise and good men, as even the reformers were, who dissented from the established religion of the hierarchy. And their whole reasoning seems to go no farther, than that a discerning legislature should not consult the exclusive personal interests or prejudices of any man, or body of men, but should steadily adhere to that which is for the good of the community at large.

It would be really contrary to tolerance, were dissenters to hold a different language. They certainly have a right to regulate the discipline of their own ceremonial, as they think proper. But liberty of conscience, at the same time, gives an equal right to those who hold a contrary opinion. Moreover, if many passages of Scripture do not altogether ascertain the difference between the

orders of bishops and presbyters; that difference, if it be of any consequence, is yet to be illustrated and defined by some of the earliest establishments. In the beginning of the Apocalypse, for instance, the bishops are peculiarly distinguished from all other members of the Christian communities. Their order, at that time, was generally established; and they were, unquestionably, invested with peculiar powers of superintendency, soon after the decease of St. John.

But haughty and interested claims of exclusive rights from prescription, cannot be justified. If it be urged, that some reform is wanting, there are few, I believe, who will not have difficulty in withholding their acquiescence. No flow of words, no shining periods, no display even of metaphysical subtlety can, in these days, teach men to believe that what has been an expedient is now settled into a right, and become absolutely indefeasible. The law speaks fundamentally the reverse. It acknowledges in the legislature, what it would be absurd to call in question, a right to alter, and amend, as in its wisdom shall seem meet.* A

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* A. G. vi. Ann. 7.

contrary interpretation would, from the words, be unequivocally high treason.

Let us continue, then, if there be necessity for what was done on the spur of an occasion, the test of an oath, a declaration to satisfy the magistrate, that those who profess the Roman Catholic religion in this country do not entertain principles that are dangerous to society, and repugnant to civil and religious liberty. More is unnecessary. And even this cannot hold good in regard to any other sect of dissenters. Moreover, have not the Roman Catholics themselves made a protestation to parliament, that they reject and detest the position, that princes excommunicated by the pope, or by authority of the see of Rome, may be deposed or murdered by their subjects; that they deny, in the strongest terms, that the obligation of oaths can be dispensed with by any spiritual power; that a priest, can pardon perjury and high treason, or that faith is not to be kept with heretics?

Beyond an oath of renunciation, therefore, of such impious and dangerous tenets, all other exaction, I should think, unnecessary. Let that be administered. Let the Roman Catholics be again admitted into the rank of citizens. And

let them not for ever bend under the severity of laws, which humanity cannot read without horror. Even Blackstone, who was not entirely unprejudiced, says, " If a time should ever arrive, and perhaps it is not very distant, when all fears of a pretender shall have vanished; and the power and influence of the pope shall have become feeble, ridiculous, and despicable, not only in England, but in every country of Europe, it probably would not be amiss to review and soften the rigorous statutes now in force."

Every man in England, every subject in his individual capacity, grand juries, bodies corporate, all have the undoubted right of petitioning the legislature, either for the amendment of laws, or for the repeal of them : for, that our constitution has arrived at the utmost point of perfection, it would be incorrect perhaps to say. It is, however, a very good old constitution, notwithstanding what Mr. Paine may say against it ; it has stood many a hard struggle ; it has held out a glorious example ; and if not quite so clear from infirmities as its fond admirers would wish it to be, it is still capable of being kept upon its legs in vigour, in honour, and, I trust, in permanency.

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In regard to the church, it has not been dissenters alone, who have called for an alternative treatment,—a radical, though, at the same time, a lenient reform. A learned bishop himself observes, there is something, undoubtedly, odd in having two creeds, the Nicene and the Athanasian, established in the same church;* in the one of which those are declared accursed, who deny the Son to be of the same substance with the Father; and in the other, those are declared incapable of salvation, who do not assert, there is one substance of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. Did not even Archbishop Tillotson wish the church well rid of the Athanasian creed, and all its perplexities?

The liturgy, and the articles of the church of England, we should always recollect, were framed above two centuries ago; when Christendom was just emerging from the ignorance and barbarism of the dark ages. They remain still nearly the same; and cannot, therefore, be supposed entirely suited to the good sense and liberality of the present times. And yet, in this country of liberty, a test is required, not whether a man be a believer in Christ, and a good and faithful subject, but whether

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* Bishop of Clogher's Essay on Spirit.

ther he be a conformist to a certain ceremonial: and this too, when we have, as the late Lord Chatham energetically expressed it, "Calvinistical articles, an Arminian clergy, and a popish liturgy." *

All incapacities, which are complained of, it is said, originate with the dissenters, and rest with them. But this is an assertion which cannot easily obtain credit. Those who have hastily dropped the expression, should reconsider it. It no more belongs to good sense, than the contrary assertion would, that the Episcopalians are afraid of the superior abilities of the dissenters; or that they have an irrevocable law, like that made by the Ephesians against the philosopher Hermodorus, which declared, "No citizen should eclipse the rest by his superior merit." Draw the line fairly, and confess that talents and ability, honesty and fidelity, are not confined either to the one, or to the other.

There are no natural claims to political employments. And, therefore, it is neither wise nor liberal, to cut off eligibility to civil offices. He who is the best fitted, should unquestionably be the first selected. Nor, whatever the adverse

* Parliamentary Debates, 1772.

verse party may say, can it be readily believed, that the numerous bodies of English Protestant dissenters, of Roman Catholic dissenters, and of no less than two millions of Scots dissenters, can all so essentially merit exclusion, as to be forever debarred from those honourable and active situations, in which the best minds delight to be placed.

LETTER CVI.

AND now, I fancy, you will think it time for me to draw to a conclusion. We have gone over much ground together; and we have had something more stubborn than phantoms to encounter. You will, however, I am sure, agree with me in one point, that it is at length sufficiently evident, that men should learn to tolerate nothing ancient; which reason does not respect, and not to shrink from any novelty, to which reason may conduct. There is, in truth, no bulwark existing now, between the general body of mankind, and the reflecting few. The case is not as it was formerly, when like two distinct nations inhabiting the same country, the opinions of philosophers had but little influence upon the opinions of the multitude. The people cannot speculate profoundly; but the truths which regulate the moral and political actions of man, are obvious to every understanding. The advantages of learning are no longer circumscribed

circumscribed within definite limits. The voice of truth is the oracle of God. That which is right and fit in human intercourse, is no longer problematical.

Now whether common sense be innate, and all evidence intuitive ; or whether it be not innate, and all judgment be not the consequence of interior principle, is a question of very little importance to the generality of the world. Common sense there is, and it is the best and most uniform sense we are possessed of. And whatever may be the metaphysician's abstraction about first causes, the mathematician's reasoning, from point, line, and surface ; the mechanician's deduction from elasticity, weight, form, or proportion ; or whether, in short, men be supposed to walk forward or to walk backward ; seeing or not seeing ; the sun will rise to-morrow, according to the conclusions of the honest farmer ; *a posteriori* or *a priori*, it will lead him with light to his daily labour ; and with its beneficial influence will at last conduct him to his ultimate reward. This in short, whether you call it common sense, or innate sense, or impressed sense, is a sense which guides without perplexing.

Again,

Again, while the most subtle arguments are straining for the erection of mystery on metaphysics, of revelation on philosophy, and of matter of fact on occult and speculative reasoning, the unpresuming multitude think of nothing more, than that, if they do well, they shall have a right to hope for reward ; or, if they do amiss, that they shall have reason to apprehend punishment. Unlettered, and not knowing, for the extension of the boundaries of human understanding, how to prove that matter is eternal ; or, for enlarging the stock of earthly happiness, to demonstrate the extinction of spirit,—they humbly believe, “ heaven and earth shall pass away, but that God’s word shall not pass away ;” and that, though they may be unable to criticise the creed, they shall be no losers by keeping the commandments.

But these are the vulgar who go to church, and who would make one suppose, that they part with their passions and depravities on saying their prayers. They are, indeed, the vulgar ; for they have been told, and they believe, that they shall be forgiven, if they repent and amend their lives ; and nothing appears to them more equitable or natural. When their children are faulty,

they know how necessary it is to make them repent ; and therefore, however contrary to fashion, they cannot, in any manner, comprehend the doctrine, which asserts the meanness, the unreasonableness, and the wretchedness of repentance.*

Do not mistake me. All useless misery, I will readily grant you, is folly ; and he who feels evils before they come, may be deservedly censured. To dread the future, is much more reasonable than to lament the past. The business of life is to go forward. He who sees evil in prospect meets it in his way ; but he who catches it by retrospection, turns back to find it. Marshal Turenne thus used to admire the precept, which directs us, “ not to spend our time in regretting any mistakes which we may have committed, but to set ourselves immediately and vigorously to repair them.” And hence we are not to repine, though we are always lawfully to struggle. The calamities of life, like the necessities of nature, are, on all occasions, calls to labour, and exercises of diligence.†

And this is the ground upon which the poor man acts, who goes to church and says his prayers.

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* Spinoza.

† Johnson.

He looks to God for forgiveness. And I think it will not be denied, that, without the belief of divine mercy, the influence of prayer would be very inconsiderable upon the moral conduct. Where there is no hope, there can be no endeavour. A constant and unfailing obedience is, I fear, impossible: and, therefore, the progress of life would only be the natural descent of negligent despair from crime to crime, did not the universal persuasion of forgiveness, to be obtained by proper means of reconciliation, recal those to the paths of virtue, whom their passions had solicited aside, and animate to new attempts, and firmer repentance, those whom difficulty had discouraged, or negligence surprised.

I know not what other men may think; but, for myself, I frankly confess I cannot conceive why it should be extravagant to believe, that a benevolent deity may be pleased to see men happy; or why it should be inconsistent with the common feelings of men, to supplicate the author of their nature for relief, or to suppose that he may be pleased with such supplication. In deep affliction, there is certainly no balm equal to that of pouring out the heart to the Supreme Being, and of expressing entire resignation to his
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will.* When once people cease to attend to the worship of God, it is always to be observed that they very soon cease to fear him, and to obey his word. Hence the argument, that it is better to pray even by form, than not to pray; for, if it were not for forms of prayers, many persons would not pray at all.

This, however, does not come under the same description with absolution and indulgencies; which most fatally and perniciously give quick and easy hopes, upon short, forced, and imperfect repentance. It aims, on the contrary, at practical and progressive amendment; and depends upon salvation, only as it adheres to virtue and morality.

The noblest objects can yield no delight, if there be not in the mind a disposition to enjoy them. To produce any capacity of enjoyment, there must be a congruity between the mind and the object. To the man of science, therefore, demonstration is pleasure; to the philosopher, the study of nature; to the voluptuary, the gratification of appetite; to the poet, the pleasures of the imagination. These objects they
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* Lord Kaim.

all respectively pursue as their proper business, as pleasures adapted to that part of their nature which they have been accustomed to indulge and cultivate. Now, as men are universally inclined to act consistently with these their general views and habitual tendencies, would it not be absurd to expect, that the philosopher should look for his sovereign good at a feast, or the sensualist, in the pleasures of intellect or piety? A clown, who should hear a scholar, or an artist, talk of the delights of a library, a cabinet of pictures, or a concert, could not guess at the nature of the pleasures they afford, because he would bring to them an eye blind to proportion, an understanding new to science, and an ear-deaf to harmony.

“The devotion of the poet or the philosopher may be secretly nourished,” says Mr. Gibbon, “by prayer, by meditation, and by study. But the exercise of public worship appears to be the only solid foundation of the religious sentiments of the people, which derive their force from imitation and habit.”* For what unity or uniformity, what order, what decency, without public worship? If men did ever assemble for religious purposes,

* Roman History.

purposes, (and the reasonableness, the necessity of this, will be apparent, as long as they are capable of having either their memories refreshed, or their affections raised by sensible objects, as long as they have either recollection or senses, that is, as long as they continue to be men), if, in such assemblies, they did not make use of a common form of worship, every one would have a psalm, a doctrine, a tongue, a revelation, an interpretation; and what would all this produce but tumult, strife, and universal confusion?*

Do not think lightly of the practices, then, or of the ceremonials of religion. Small things appertain to great ones; and they are always the apparently inconsiderable precautions, which maintain the sublimer virtues. Do not conceive it possible to have a Christian world without a Christian education. Religion is, perhaps, the only thing in which we seem to look for the end, without making use of the means. And yet this expectation is not less unreasonable than it would be to expect, that our children should become artists and scholars, without being bred to arts and languages.

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• Bishop Law.

“That religion is necessary to strengthen, and that it contributes to support government,” says Bolingbroke, “cannot be denied, without contradicting reason and experience.” This some men, indeed, have been extravagant enough to do. Civil obligations are imposed by the laws of man; but religious obligations are imposed by the laws of God: and, as the authority of the legislator is far greater in the one case than in the other, so is the sanction of the law, and the punishments of another life, instead of the pains and penalties of this. Religion, in its principle, reaches to the inward dispositions of the heart and mind; whereas civil government goes no farther than to regulate the outward conduct. In a word, as neither reason nor revelation, neither Heathen nor Christian philosophers, neither human nor divine laws, have been able to reform the manners of men effectually; and as such is the imperfect state in which we are placed in the universal system, nothing should be neglected that may enforce moral obligations, and all the doctrines of natural religion.

Considering Deity as the author of our existence, we owe him gratitude; considering him as governor of the world, we owe him obedience:
and

and upon these duties is founded the obligation we are under to worship him. And further, as the universality of the sense of Deity proves it to be innate, the same reason proves the principle of devotion to be innate; for all men agree in worshipping superior beings, whatever difference there may be in their modes of worship. "God hath shewed thee, O man, what is good: and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"*

The God of nature should accordingly be approached by public, as well as by private adoration; for devotion, like joy or grief, is to be spread from sympathy; and the piety of a numerous assembly is certainly much invigorated by mutual communication. A regular habit of expressing publicly our gratitude and resignation never fails to purify the mind, and to wean it from every unlawful pursuit. Moreover, forms are always necessary, wherever a number of persons join in one operation. They are essential, the soldier will tell you, in an army; and little less essential, believe me, are they in public worship.†

The deliverance from the numerous and burdensome superstitions of the papal communion drove many pious reformers into the contrary extreme; and the rage of opposition ended in a devotion entirely spiritual and abstracted. External forms, in consequence, were abolished, as impediments to the visionary reveries of a mental-intercourse with heaven; and because the church of Rome had carried ceremonies to an absurd excess, the use of any ceremonies was deemed unlawful. But the wisdom of this is certainly questionable. The shadows and baubles which please the child, can no longer satisfy him when he becomes the man. Yet, is not bigotry against ornament, almost as unphilosophical as bigotry for ornament. Luther, for instance, was fond of music; but it was not for the music itself, he said: it, on the contrary, would seem, from some passages in his writings, that he was led to encourage it, as much to offend the evil spirit, as to please himself: "*Scimus,*" says he, "*musicam demonibus etiam invisam et intolerabilem esse.*" *

True religion always inspires grandeur of mind, as superstition does littleness. And I believe

* Dr. Burney.

lieve it to be invariably the case, that the more honesty a man has, the less he affects the air of a saint. Nothing can give more encouragement to irreligion, than the sanctified absurdity of quarrelling with trifles. Is it not enough that a man shall be a Christian, but that he must be so upon ridiculous grounds? Sectarists, a plain man might say, attend to your own affairs. I am not a Christian because you are one; because St. Austin was one; or because Calvin was one. I am a Christian, because my own reason tells me it is right to be one. Moreover I will add, that so firmly am I persuaded the first principles of a sound religion are such only as can render mankind *morally* better, that if I knew of any religion, or of any system of philosophy, more conducive to that end than Christianity, I should not hesitate a moment to embrace it.

The pillars of religion are too frequently shaken by those who preserve the name, without the substance, of religion; and who indulge the license, without the temper of philosophy. Even in the earliest days, in the profession of Christianity, the vanity of peculiar characters is easily to be distinguished. The natives of Syria and Egypt abandoned their lives to lazy and contemplative devotion. Rome, on

her part, aspired to the dominion of the world ; and the wit of the lively and loquacious Greeks was consumed in the disputes of metaphysical theology. Thus, in the polemic microscope, an atom may be enlarged to a monster ; and each party hath often had the skill to exaggerate the absurd or impious conclusions, that were to be extorted from the principles of their adversaries. “ Every wind,” says the historian, “ has been seen to scatter the leaves of controversy.”*

There never was found, then, to use the expression of the great Lord Bacon, in any age of the world, either philosophy, or sect, or religion, or law, or discipline, which did so highly exalt the public good, as the Christian faith. And yet so great a change was made in it by the hierarchy, that Wickliffe and Luther were almost at a loss to discover it. Dr. Cudworth had reason on his side, when he doubted, whether the truth of the Christian religion was more apparent in having prevailed against its enemies, or in not having been smothered by the frauds and forgeries of its friends.

From the earliest ages of the church, to the Reformation, the principal wounds which Christianity

* Gibbon.

Christianity received, it received from the abuse of reason in its friends; and the most striking and fatal instance of that abuse, was the attempt to comprehend mysteries, and the presumption of explaining them; drawing inferences from them, and erecting those explanations and inferences into doctrines of Scripture and articles of faith. For what inferences can be drawn from mysterious doctrines, (I do not mean unintelligible propositions) which are not plainly, and fully comprehensible by us, as they stand revealed in Scripture? In such cases, it is not given to us to depart, even from the very expression of Scripture; and for this obvious reason, that, where the meaning is confessedly above our reach, we can never be sure that we say the same thing, any longer than while we use the same words. If we depart from this rule, we interpret, we infer, and, for ought we know, we substitute our own conjectural explanations and conclusions for the word of God. We do little more, as it were, than translate at a venture from a language we do not understand.*

But, while a man talks like a saint, and yet lives like a sinner; while he professes to believe like an apostle, and yet leads the life of a sensualist;

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sensualist;

• Mr. Twining.

sualist ; while he talks of an ardent faith, and yet exhibits a cold and low practice ; boasts himself the disciple of a meek master, and yet is as much a slave to his passions, as they who acknowledge no such authority ; while he appears the proud professor of an humble religion, or the intemperate champion of a self-denying one ; does not such a man bring Christianity into disrepute, confirm those in error who might have been awakened to conviction, strengthen doubt into disbelief, and harden indifference into contempt ?*

Immense, in truth, are the blessings which men in society reap from the union of pure religion with sound morality. But, however immense, some have been almost led to doubt whether it may not be affirmed, that they have scarcely counterbalanced the manifold evils that society hath suffered from impure religion, indulging, and even encouraging, gross immoralities. In matters of worldly importance, there is generally, among men, great uniformity of opinion. Religious differences, on the contrary, are generally about trifles, where liberty ought to be indulged without reserve ; and yet, upon these trifles are founded the bitterest enmities. This, it is certain,

* On the Religion of the Fashionable World.

tion, is not always taken notice of; for the observers are few, who possess a clear and comprehensive view of the revolutions of society, and who attend to the nice and secret springs of action, which impel, in the same uniform direction, the blind and capricious passions of the multitude.

Absurdity in speculation, and superstition in practice, we may very safely say, have long been cultivated with success. Nor has it been unusual to see men venture to defend in the light, what was imposed in the dark, or to display knowledge in the justification of ignorance. Commencing with the search of truth, but unhappily under the conduct of error, they often work up their heated imaginations to such a delirium, that the more genius and the more learning they possess, the more incomprehensible they grow. They are sworn, as it were, to follow, all their lives, the authority of some particular school; and the condition of their engagement would seem to be, to defend certain doctrines, and even mere forms of speech, without examination, or to examine, only the more pertinaciously to confound.

To accede to injurious opinions, is certainly to take part with the obsequious partisans of mistaken courtesy, and to be a miserable unit in a monopoly of blind and servile applause. But the subject is more serious, when in particular it concerns religion. Opinions, which contradict reason, ought never to be admitted under the sanction of revelation. Opinions, which render the sincerity of sober men suspected, and the faith of honest men ridiculous, should, on the contrary, always be condemned. "For," as Butler says, "am I to believe that religion was intended for nothing else, but to be mended?" God most undoubtedly brought light out of darkness; but men would bring darkness out of light. While many have pretended to be guides, they have each wandered different ways, and all without any guide whatever. For in this case, I am afraid, it has been most literally verified, that the blind have led the blind, and that they have all fallen, some into one ditch, and some into another.

Religion has (and its friends may be proud to say it) a sufficiency of lights, for irradiating those who will see: though, it must be owned, no inconsiderable quantity of clouds have been raised to blind the heedless and inconsiderate

considerate. Mysteries are of no benefit to it. The common man is bewildered by them ; the thinking man rendered unhappy. For true religion does not consist of arbitrary dogmas, which we should believe ; it consists of moral principles, which we should put in practice. That which is not to be rationally accounted for, let us then leave where it is. It is better to be a good citizen, a good neighbour, a good father of a family, and a good friend, than to be a good theologian. The one we all feel to be sterling and valuable currency. The other, likewise, may have its value ; but it is like the ore which is blended with the brute matter, and which requires the aid of the furnace, if not of the whole power of chymistry, to refine it.

The most important of all laws, that which is neither engraved upon marble, nor upon brass, but on the hearts of men, which makes the true constitution of a state ; which day after day increases in force ; which, while other laws are little attended to, is ever upon the watch ; and which insensibly substitutes the force of habit for the force of authority ; that law, so strong and so solid, consists of the pure principles of an established religion ; and of the customs and manners,

ners, which are naturally deduced from it.* From good institutions, therefore, there must evermore result wholesome practices: and thus, according to the remark of Montesquieu, "there are examples, which are more hurtful to a community than crimes; and more nations have fallen into destruction from a violation of useful practices, than from a violation of statute laws."

You may accuse me here, perhaps, of puritanical fastidiousness, or suppose me actuated by a narrow-spirited timidity. But, I trust, neither the one character nor the other, belongs to me. My only aim is consistency, and what appears to me to be the general good. The present century is, certainly, not one of the least enlightened of even the most shining epochs of the world. Yet what good old opinions have not been licentiously unhinged? Nay, is there any one branch of religious morality which has not been attacked? As politics, sciences, and physics, so also Christianity has, as I have often exhibited to you, met with the most indecent, as well as the most inveterate, opposers.

I speak of a people, and of the general good, as I would speak of a man. Temperance, for instance,

* Rousseau.

instance, is a real good. It renders men happy in themselves, and useful to others. Temperance, prudence, and fortitude, are qualities at all times necessary to our happiness, and form a great part of the perfection of our nature. We must even cease to esteem ourselves, and to distinguish what is excellent, when such qualifications incur our neglect. Yet; this is different from those who act, as if force and right were the same. The old Roman mob drivers were accustomed to cry out, *Appellamus ad populum*. And Anacharsis, the Scythian, at an assembly of the people at Athens, whispered to a friend, "It is singular, that in Athens wise men plead causes, but fools determine them."

The desires of man invariably increase with his acquisitions. Every step he advances brings something within his view, which he did not see before, and which as soon as he sees he begins to want. Where necessity ends curiosity begins; and no sooner are we supplied with every thing that nature can demand, than we sit down to contrive artificial appetites, and to indulge them with lavish prodigality; for he seldom lives frugally; who lives by chance. Hope is always liberal; and they who trust her promises make little scruple

scruple of revelling to-day on the profits of to-morrow.

A sense, more or less distinct, of right and wrong, is granted to every individual. Were any man entirely destitute of it, the terms would be to him as unintelligible, as the terms white and black are to one who is blind. There is no absurdity in supposing the opinions of men about right and wrong to be as various, as about beauty and deformity. At the same time, did the moral sentiments of men differ as much as their faces, they would be altogether unqualified for society. Discord and contention would be endless; and the greater force would be the only rule for settling disputes concerning *meum et tuum*.

Men assemble to deliberate on business; they separate from jealousies of interest; but, in their several collisions, whether as friends or enemies, a fire is always struck out, which a regard to interest or safety cannot confine. As actors, or spectators, we are thus perpetually made to feel the difference of human conduct; and from a bare recital of transactions, which have passed in ages and countries
very

very-remote from our own, are moved with admiration and pity, or transported with indignation and rage.* And in this manner, strange as it may seem, we find men, who, in their speculations deny the reality of moral distinctions, forget in detail the general positions they maintain, and give loose to ridicule, indignation, and scorn, as if any of these sentiments could have place, were the actions of men indifferent; or with acrimony pretend to detect the fraud, by which moral restraints have been imposed; as if to censure a fraud were not already to take part on the side of morality.

It is not at all unusual to see subtle abilities overset the whole order of reasoning, in the pursuit of a particular scent. Dash they fly over hedge and ditch, through thick and thin. Nothing stops them. They have given the view hollow; and unless they knock up in the chace, flatter themselves with being in at the death. Yet is not an unworthy trail sometimes imposed? And do not the staunchest hounds mouth at a mere cheat, as vociferously as they would at a stag or a fox? To reverse the pyramid, then, is no uncommon thing. And instead of rearing up from a broad foundation of particulars

* Ferguson.

particulars laid in knowledge, to the lofty and terminating pinnacle, the heedless architect would preposterously affect to set the pinnacle upon the ground, and to raise the pyramid without any foundation at all.

Even scepticism is made to supply an apology for superstition. But, what reason cannot instruct, custom, surely, may be permitted to guide. Nor is it any mark of folly to persist in salutary opinions, and not to risk the unknown perils that may attend rash innovation. Men rarely leave one extreme, without running into the other. And why? Because few have been blessed with either the opportunity, or the disposition, for wholesome investigation. They have but one impulse, in general, according as they are carried along by the authority of a leader, by the authority of a party, by the authority of the multitude, or by the authority of their passions.

Morality, theology, and the art of reasoning, are, however, acknowledged to be three principal branches of a learned education; and are justly held to be so, because they are our only sure guides in passing through the intricate paths

paths of life. They are not, notwithstanding, altogether supposed essential to every one. The most profound philosopher, for instance, might be but an insipid figure in the company of the thoughtless and chattering, might be somewhat uncouth in the vortex of dissipation, and an absolute absurdity among gamesters. But, notwithstanding these cogent objections, it may be pronounced that such studies are not altogether unsuitable to the most brilliant character. Contradictory opinions, also, that have influence on practice, are deeply to be regretted by every person of a sound heart.* “The animal conveniencies,” wisely observes Hume, “sink gradually in their value, in the breasts of those who generously seek for fame.” The man of virtue looks down with contempt on all the allurements of pleasure, and all the menaces of danger. Toils, hardships, and death itself, carry their charms, when we brave them for the public good.†

The spur of general benevolence is, therefore, the most irresistible in nature. It sheds the purest glory around the labours of the worthy. The good man “may hold his head in sunbeams, and his foot on storms.” He is the only
great

* Lord Kaim.

† Moral and Political Essays.

great and independent being upon earth. Tranquility is the inseparable companion of virtue ; it is the health of the mind. Without this, no intellectual joy can be tasted ; as without the health of the body, no corporeal pleasure. The virtuous man looks back with complacency ; the present satisfies him ; and the future gives him no alarm. Thus, without a paradox, virtue may be said to be its own reward.

Reason, however, of which I have said so much, has been by many pronounced to be mischievous, and to be made instrumental to the most wicked purposes. I grant it. Fire, also, has committed the most dreadful ravages. But how does this prove the absolute curse, either of reason or of fire ? Fire serves for several necessary uses ; and sensitive experience teaches us to distinguish between warming and burning. Shall we, therefore, renounce the use of it, and complain that there is such an element, because it burns us, when we employ it ill, or when we neglect in employing it, the precautions and attentions that are necessary ? Just so, human reason is given for several necessary uses, and principally to lead us to all the happiness we are made capable of attaining, by a proper application of it,

it, which rational experience is sufficient to teach us.

“On similar grounds,” says Dr. Johnson, “he who pleases himself too much with minute exactness, and submits to endure nothing below the point of perfection, will be harrassed with innumerable distresses; from which those who have not in the same manner increased their sensations, find no disturbance. The smoothest polish of the most solid bodies, exposed to the microscope, discovers cavities and prominencies: the softest bloom of beauty abounds with excrescencies. Thus the senses, as well as the perceptions, may be improved to our own disquiet; and we may, by diligent cultivation of the powers of dislike, raise in time an artificial fastidiousness, which shall fill the imagination with phantoms of turpitude, shew us the naked skeleton of every delight, and present us only with the pains of pleasure, and the deformities of beauty.”

Bad habits and bad customs, I know, are difficult to be eradicated; but I also know, that good habits and good customs are as difficult to be eradicated, if once they be firmly rooted. To tell men to act against the immediate and uni-

form dictates of nature, would be preposterous. It would be to advise an inhabitant of Brasil or Sumatra not to shiver at an English winter ; or one who has always lived upon a plain, to look from a precipice without emotion : it is to suppose custom instantaneously controlable by reason, and to endeavour to communicate by precept, that which only time and experience can bestow.

Certain individuals of the sacred character, I will allow you, and those too, who have with the most apparent fervour preached up the efficacy of religion, morality, and reason, have exhibited very reprehensible exceptions in their own immediate conduct. The mild Cardinal Fleury, during his administration, issued fifty-four thousand *Lettres de Cachet*, upon the single ground of the Bull Unigenitus. But man is man : and all ages have had their moments of superstition. At the same time, I am far from joining in the orthodoxy of Saint Augustine, who compared a priest, whose life disagreed with his doctrines, to a directing road-post. Would not a traveller, says the saint, deserve to be reckoned a madman, who should refuse to follow the advice written on
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the post, because, forsooth, the post does not stir a foot towards the place it directs him ?

Let us be candid; however ; and let not the depravities of a few indelibly stain the fair fame of the many. On the continent, particularly in France, clerical estates were so enormous, that they almost compelled the heads of the church to extravagance and dissipation. And even their pretensions may admit of some degree of palliation : for power, by whatever corps, has never been refused whenever it could be readily acquired. Yet have the Roman Catholics been the only people, among whom clerical assumptions have been towering and arrogant ? Was Luther modest and unassuming ; was Calvin indulgent, and free from intolerance ? Or did this latter stern, and inflexible reformer do much more, in the parts where he reigned paramount, than shut up local monasteries, to make Carthusians, if possible, of all mankind ?

It has always been strangely fashionable, to traduce the teachers of religion ; and in proportion as their doctrines have militated against immoral dissipation, to calumniate both their characters and function. They are, it is

said, " Lovers of lordship, and troublers of state." They may have been so ; and they may be so still. Nor do I see what mighty crime it is for a respectable man, of a highly cultivated understanding, to wish to have what may yield the necessaries, if not the comforts, or even the luxuries of life. But in our own country, of England, where, by the way, we are not a whit more liberal than our neighbours, can you conceive it possible, there can be five thousand five hundred and ninety-seven livings, which, one with another, are not worth above thirty pounds a year? The whole income of the English church, including archbishoprics, bishoprics, deans and chapters, rectories, vicarages, dignities and benefices of all kinds, and even the two universities, with their respective colleges, do not amount, upon the most accurate calculation, to above one million five hundred thousand pounds a year. Nor is this the hereditary property of any class of men, like that of Levi among the Jews. The property of the church, is the reversionary property of every family in the kingdom.

As to their turbulency, or the criminality of their intrigues, as has been often insinuated, such accusations are too unfounded to merit any thing

thing like a serious refutation. Nay, so far have they been from either turbulency or intrigue, that I have long considered, and I hope the country will long consider the clergy who are dispersed through the kingdom, as a little leaven, preserving from extreme corruption the whole mass; and indeed the great kindness and respect, with which the whole order is treated in general, by the best and most enlightened part of the laity, is a proof they are considered in that valuable light.

But suppose there were no religious establishment: those who are now bred to the church, would then apply their money, their time, and their talents, in some other way. And there are few ways, in which they might not be able to procure for themselves, and for their families, as good, or a better provision than they at present derive from the church. We see, in the course of every century, a great many ample fortunes accumulated by other professions; but it is a rare thing, to see a churchman, in consequence of his profession, lifting his posterity above the common level, either in rank or fortune. We, on the contrary, too often find, that even prelates cannot make such moderate provi-

sion for their children, as their mode of living would give them some little right to expect.

While the illiberal enemies of the clerical character, therefore, would wantonly find fault with their slender, and, in many instances, hard-earned means, it might be as well for the real good of society, were other less useful, less respectable, but infinitely more oppressive functionaries among the good people of England, to be a little more minutely inquired into. It is not my business to point them out. But, I cannot but look upon it as treachery to ourselves, that the persons and professions of men, who deserve esteem for their virtue, their knowledge, and their services, should be placed in wrong lights, or by misrepresentations be made the subjects of hatred and distrust.

The subversion of every thing good, as well as bad, assuredly accords neither with discretion nor good sense. We may perhaps be pardoned, for at times admiring even wildness and extravagancy. But it is not safe to imitate them. Sober men cannot fall down, and indiscriminately worship the rising sun of innovation. It is not because they are incapable of being warm-

ed by the beams of liberal inquiry; but because, however the inconsiderate may exult in the splendour of the object, they think they perceive, amid the lustre it throws around the horizon, certain indications of a destructive storm. The blind adoption of untried principles bespeaks less good sense, than the adherence to systems long venerated, and from their known beneficial tendencies, long sanctioned by the virtuous fiat of nations. Nothing but extreme necessity can make men so desperate, as to induce them to leap before they look. In the general constitution, all may not, indeed, be so perfect as it ought. Yet though the blemishes may be evident, the subject may, in itself, be both sound and admirable. Few honest men are averse from improvement, or afraid to attempt it. But there are multitudes, who, though gifted with the best talents, shrink at the hazard of eccentric experiment; and dread the fanaticism of desperate reformation.

It has been asserted, that religions, like forms of government, are adapted to soils and climate. But Christianity reigned a long time in Asia. It commenced in Palestine; and has penetrated into Norway and Lapland.*

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• Voltaire.

The northern coast of Africa is the only land in which the light of the gospel, after a long and perfect establishment, has been totally extinguished. The arts which had been taught by Carthage and Rome were involved in a cloud of ignorance; the doctrine of Cyprian and Augustin were no longer studied; and about the year 749, all was sunk under the yoke of the Arabian prophet. About the middle of the twelfth century, also, the worship of Christ, and the succession of pastors, were abolished along the coast of Barbary; and in the kingdoms of Cordova and Seville, of Valencia, and Grenada:* in a word, the seed of the gospel was quickly eradicated; and the long sweep from Tripoli to the Atlantic, has lost all memory of the language and religion of Rome.†

The spirit of persecution has, as we have seen, prevailed destructively within the pale of Christianity. The zeal for making converts, likewise, has at times been almost as eminent. The former is, however, retiring out of the world; and I wish it most profound rest, never again to revive. People, in truth, begin to be ashamed of it, as of a garment long out of fashion. Let the other, also, have its dismissal. In superstitious zealots,
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* Pagi Critica.

† Renaudot.

it always proceeds from an opinion, that all who differ from them, are in the road to damnation. But with others the cause is more natural: they think themselves in the right, and for that reason would be happy to find the rest of the world of their opinion. Yet let every man work out his salvation in the manner most agreeable to himself. God may not be displeased with variety of thought, as variety is his own work. He may require no uniformity, except with respect to an upright mind, and a clear conscience.

Harshness or bribery, on the score of religion, are both of them in general unwise. They usually produce dissimulation. At the same time it may be questionable, whether the empress of Russia, for instance, did not use an agreeable, an efficacious, and even a laudable method for converting her Pagan subjects of Kamskatcha. She exempted such of them, as would profess Christianity, from taxes for ten years. Her situation, indeed, was peculiar; and in all rules there are exceptions, which must universally be admitted.

The diameter of the terrestrial globe is seven thousand nine hundred and seventy English miles—sixty nine miles to a degree. The surface,

face, therefore, in round numbers, may be said to be two hundred millions of square miles. Of these the sea occupies four-fifths, or one hundred and sixty millions; and the land one-fifth, or forty millions. America has more than one-third; Asia, more than one-fourth; Africa, one-fourth; and Europe, one-eighth. According to this measurement, the Pagans, supposing the whole earth divided into thirty parts, possess nineteen parts; the Mahommedans and Jews; six parts; the Grecian church, two parts; and the Roman Catholics and Protestants, three parts. Thus, on the most probable calculation, the Christians do not occupy more than *one-sixth part* of the whole surface of the earth.*

Have the bulk of mankind, then, let me ask in the words of Locke, no other guide, but accident and blind chance, to conduct them to their happiness or misery? Are the current opinions and licensed guides of every country, sufficient evidence and security to every man to venture his greatest concerns on; nay, his everlasting happiness or misery? Or can those be certain and infallible oracles and standards of truth, which teach one thing in Christendom and another thing in Turkey? Or shall a poor country-

* Duten's Itineraire,

country-man be eternally happy, for having the chance to be born in Italy, or a day-labourer be unavoidably damned, because he had the ill-luck to be born in England? Many will be ready here to say, questions such as these are not to be examined. Questions such as these, however, it is our privilege, as rational beings, to examine. But we have already glanced at them as we have come along; and therefore any thing farther would be unnecessary.

There cannot be a more dangerous inactivity of mind, let it be again repeated, than implicitly to rely upon the opinions of others; nor can any thing be more likely to mislead, since there is much more falsehood and error, than truth and knowledge, among men. Thus, if the opinions and persuasions of others whom we know, and think well of, were absolutely to be a ground of assent, men must be Heathens in Japan, Mahomedans in Arabia, Papists in Spain, Protestants in Britain, and Lutherans in Sweden. If even learning could insure infallibility, how is it, that what passes for orthodoxy in one age, shall be heterodoxy in another? But on this point also you have had my sentiments. I have even ventured to deny that God created the greatest part of mankind to be
damned

damned. On the contrary, I have asserted, that "God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him." The apostle Paul says, "The Gentiles do by nature the things contained in the law; and God will render unto every man according to his deeds."

Intolerance is, at all times, the certain way to introduce irreligion, heresy, and apathy. In every part of the world, in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, when the people are oppressed by the spiritual power, they fly to the temporal; when by the temporal, they fly to the spiritual. When both, however, aim at rendering them miserable, then arise schisms, convulsions, and that long train of civil disorders, which evermore terminates in murder and destruction. A criminal in Pagan Rome was under sentence to be starved to death. A number of days had rolled over his wasting existence. His daughter bribed, or eluded, the vigilance of his keepers. She crept into the cell. On the bare ground, and almost in the agonies of death, she found the author of her days. She wept. She kissed the pale cheek that was wont to beam with joy upon her. But she had no sustenance to offer. She had failed in the attempt to bring him a little succour. A thought, like inspiration, darted, however, at once upon

upon her soul. She trembled ; but casting an eager and apprehensive look behind her, lest she should be observed, she, with the rapidity of lightning, threw open her breast, and, from the same source whence her little infant drew his daily nourishment, she joyfully administered food to her father. The senate heard of the transaction. It was contrary to law. It was flying in the face of the stern justice of the country. Yet, as parents themselves, they could not resist the blessed impulse of a child's affection. They pardoned the father. They did more ; they pulled down the prison, and, in its place, erected a temple to filial piety.

I now have done. I am arrived at the end of a difficult journey. But, in my labour, I have found, in some measure, my enjoyment. I have had hope, to befriend me during my fatigues : nor does she even quit me now that my labours are finished. In the prospect of rendering some service to my fellow-creatures I find my reward. As I have gone along, I have been much beholden to others. Nor have I been ashamed to take assistance. " My design," says Marcus Aurelius, " has been to discharge my duty, as it is the soldier's to storm the breach. What if, because of lameness, a man cannot of himself

mount the works; cannot he do it by the help of his friends?"

I have no claims or pretensions, of course, to any thing extraordinary in what I have thus arranged for you. Neither have I been able, perhaps, to mould what I have gathered into striking forms; or to give them that relief, whence alone gratification can arise. I am not, however, an ungrateful pilferer: on the contrary, I acknowledge my debts; and were it within the reach of my ability, would gladly repay, with interest, into the common stock of learning, the sums that I have borrowed. A critic of no common eminence, has had the liberality to say, that "he who collects is laudably employed; for though he exerts no great talents in the work, he facilitates the progress of others; and, by making that easy of attainment which is already written, may give some mind, more vigorous or more adventurous than his own, leisure for new thoughts and original designs."*

The professed author is to let in new light upon the mind; to open new scenes; or to vary the dress and situation of common objects,

* Dr. Johnson.

jects, so as to give them fresh grace and more powerful attractions; to spread such flowers over the regions in which the intellect has already made some progress, as may tempt it to return, and to take a second view of things hastily passed over, or negligently regarded. But in all this much may not be his own. The most ponderous volumes might possibly be reduced to meagre shreds, were every thing scrupulously returned to its original proprietor. The strongest genius not unfrequently finds it indispensably necessary to pursue the tract of others, though he declines servilely treading in their footsteps.

And now, farewell. The attention I have endeavoured to give to my different authorities, will, besides the obvious advantage of authenticity, prevent those who may be entitled to it, from being deprived of the fair fame of their labours. To them I honestly acknowledge my obligations. They have supported me throughout. And I frankly confess, that, had it not been for them, I should long ago have relinquished, what would have been too much for my own unaided abilities.



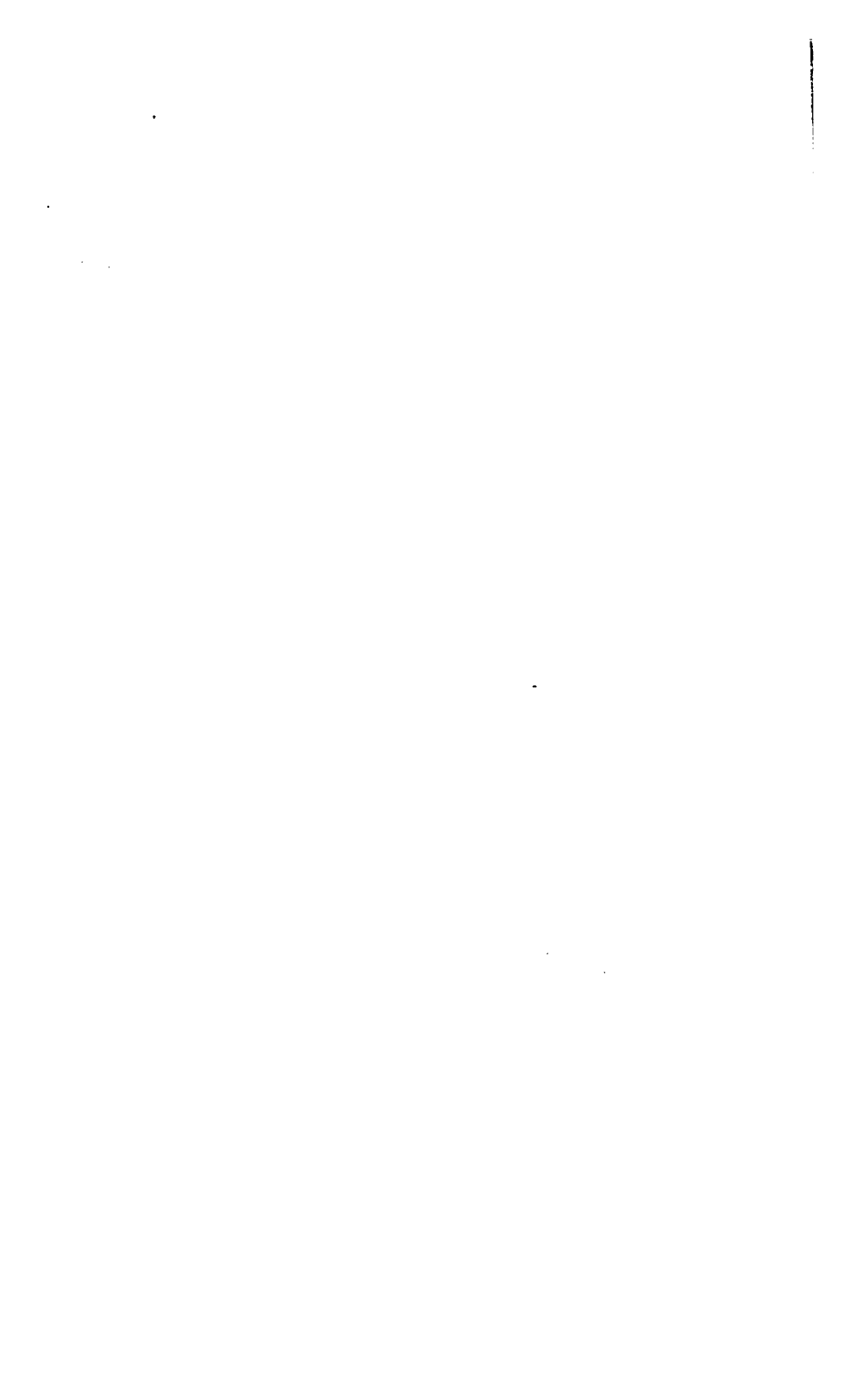
ERRATA.

VOL. VI.

Page 119, last line, for securis, read *securis*









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